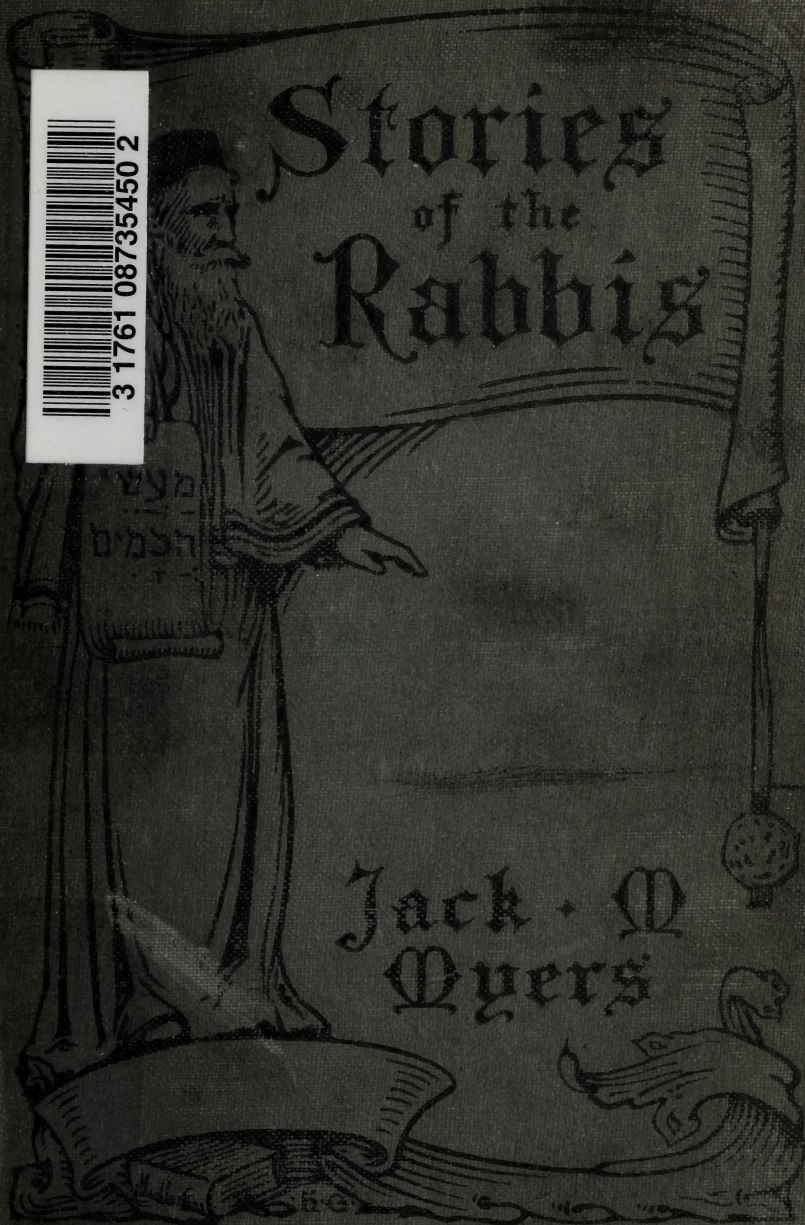




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# Stories of the Rabbis

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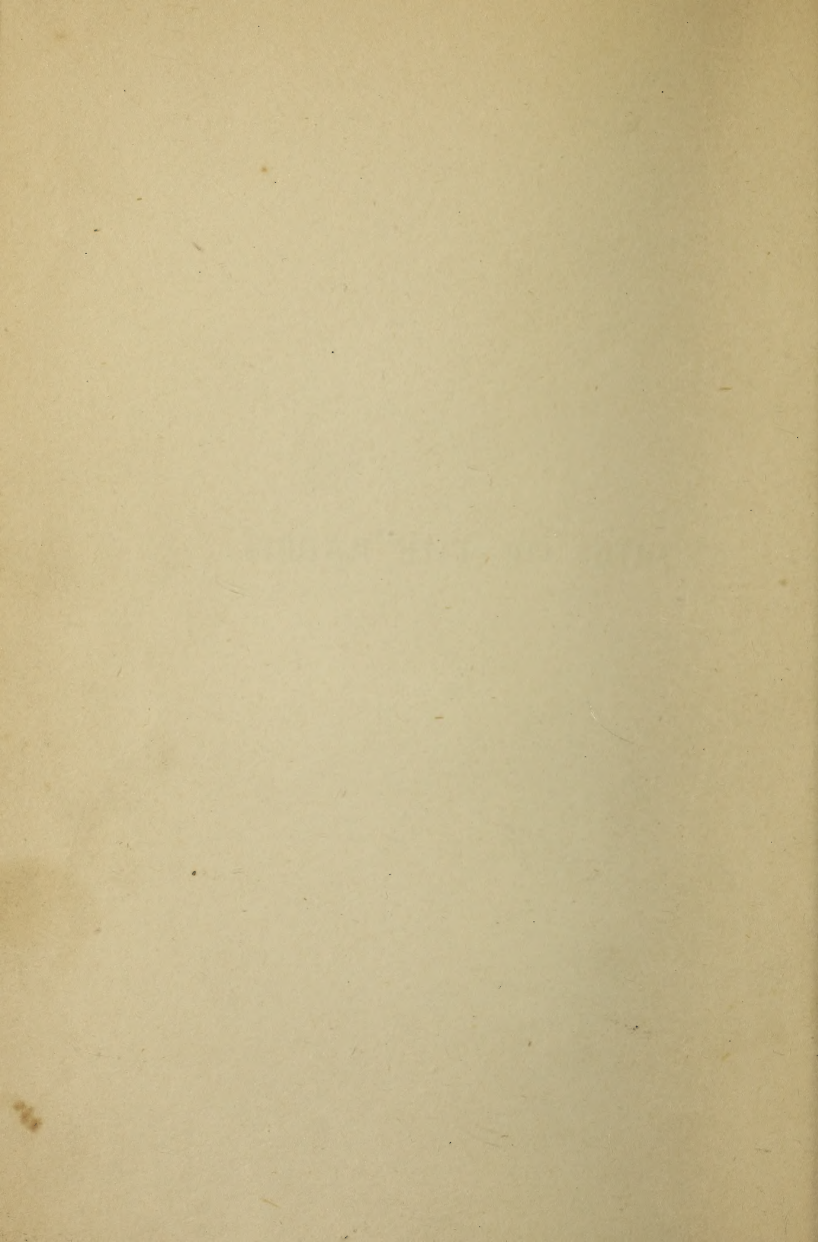
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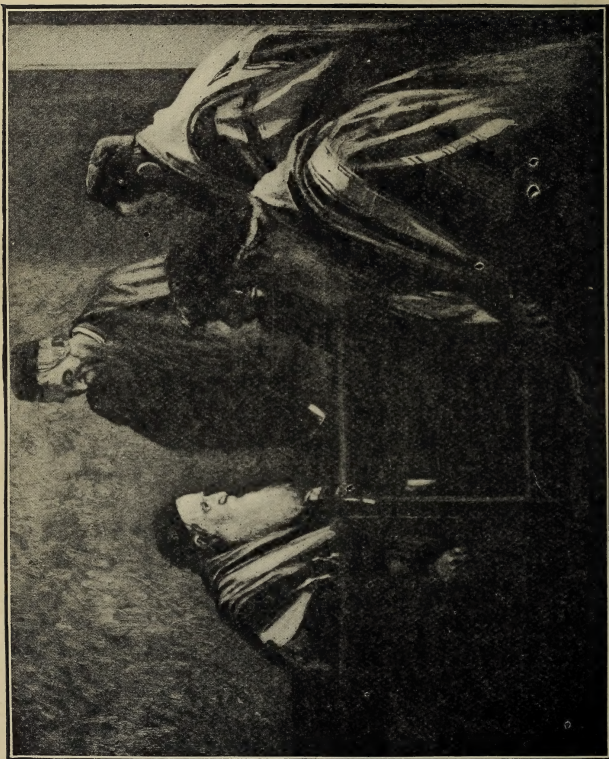


STORIES OF THE RABBIS









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# STORIES OF THE RABBIS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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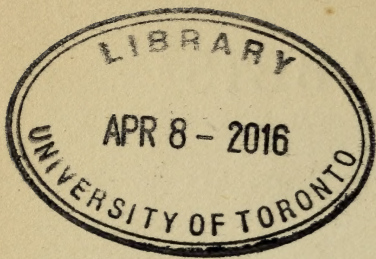
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*D E D I C A T E D*

TO MY FRIENDS

NORMAN BENTWICH, M. EPSTEIN, AND

LEON SIMON



## PREFACE

THESE "stories" are reprinted from the first volume of my book, "The Story of the Jewish People." The Rabbis chosen are among the most interesting personalities of the Tannaim who lived in the first two centuries of the present era. I have deemed it desirable to select a few of these men and give some account of their lives and teaching rather than string together a number of isolated stories of a large number of persons having no relation to each other. I have made selections from a vast mass of material, and lack of space has made it necessary to exclude much interesting matter.

I hope that the publication of this book at a popular price will do something to make known to a wider public the characters and teaching of some of the men who kept Judaism alive in days of old, and thus perhaps stimulate an interest in the wider movements of Jewish history through the ages.

My grateful thanks are due to many friends, without whose aid this volume would have contained many errors and other defects. It still has, no doubt, many imperfections, and a notification of any that may be detected will be much appreciated.

JACK M. MYERS.

LEWIS HOUSE, PHILPOT STREET,  
LONDON, E., *May* 1909.





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## INTRODUCTION

JEWISH history from the very earliest till quite recent times tells us of very many men and women who lived noble lives, and sometimes died heroic deaths in defence of their faith and their people. These "stories" give some account of the lives of some of the greatest of the Rabbis who lived in the first two centuries of the present era. To them we owe much of the teaching of Judaism and many a noble example of fine character, devotion to duty, and faith in God. They did a great deal to build up the Mishna, the wonderful collection of Jewish laws which was afterwards to form the basis of the Talmud.

The first Rabbi who is mentioned—Hillel—lived at the time of Herod the Great, who was a cruel, tyrannical King. Jerusalem was captured, and the Temple destroyed by the Romans in the year 70 c.e., but Hillel's successor, Rabban Jochanan ben Zakkai, continued to teach the Jewish Law, and he and those Rabbis who followed him were thus able to preserve Judaism for all time.

One of the most remarkable lessons to be learnt from a study of Jewish history is the continued existence of the Jewish religion and the Jewish people in spite of bitter persecution and hatred. It must interest us, therefore, to know something of the men who played a prominent part in making this possible. They were all great and good, witty and wise, and as we look back over the part they played in Jewish history they afford us many an inspiration in the present for right-doing and devotion to our faith.



# STORIES OF THE RABBIS

## CHAPTER I

70 B.C.—10 C.E.

### I. HILLEL. הלל

DURING the reign of Herod the Great there lived a man *Hillel journeys to Jerusalem.* who will be remembered as one of the noblest characters and greatest teachers in Jewish history. His name was Hillel. In the same way as the name of Herod will always be associated with deeds of cruelty and tyranny, so Hillel will live for all time as one of those great, good men whose works and teachings never die. He was descended from King David, and belonged to a family which had remained in Babylon after the return under Zerubbabel. His family had fallen on bad times when Hillel was quite a young man, but this did not prevent his seeking after knowledge. He was an earnest young scholar, and, not being able to obtain all the learning he desired in the Babylonian schools, he decided to travel to Jerusalem, and there seek "fresh woods and pastures new" in Jewish scholarship. He naturally found his way to the great school of learning in the Holy City, where the Bible was explained and the Jewish laws taught by the leading Rabbis of the time, Shemaiah and Abtalion. The latter, it will be remembered, were members of the Sanhedrin which tried Herod the Great; they were considered the greatest scholars of the period when Hillel was a young man, and Hillel afterwards called them "the greatest men of their generation."

It was against Jewish law to teach it for money, and the teacher might only charge for lessons given in time *"Are you poorer than Hillel?"* he might otherwise devote to trade. In the higher



branches of study, too, no payment at all was demanded by the Rabbis, although the doorkeepers at the school sometimes received fees. The Rabbis, accordingly, all followed some other occupation in addition to explaining and teaching the Law, and their pupils, too, were obliged to support themselves in a similar way. Hillel, it is said, was a wood-cutter. Half his earnings in these pupil days of his he devoted to supporting himself, and the other half he paid to the doorkeeper of the House of Study. He must have been very poor in these early days, for his poverty afterwards became proverbial. In later years a man who pleaded poverty as an excuse for not studying the Law, met with the question, "Are you poorer than Hillel?"

*Listening by  
the window.*

One Friday he had not earned the usual sum. It was a dark, bitterly cold winter day when Hillel arrived at the school on the eve of Sabbath, and the snow was falling fast. Not having the usual fee to give the doorkeeper, he was turned away when he presented himself at the door. But so eager was he to catch the wise words falling from the lips of the Rabbis that he took advantage of the approaching darkness, and climbed up to one of the windows of the house, and there, through a hole, he was able to listen to the "words of the living God," as explained by the Rabbis.

*Worth break-  
ing the  
Sabbath.*

When the Rabbis came to the school early next morning, the dawn seemed to be delayed longer than usual, and Shemaiah turned to his colleague and said: "Brother Abtalion, our school is strangely dark this morning." Then they looked up to see whether the snow was not covering the window, and preventing the daylight from entering. But, instead, they saw the form of a man on the window-sill, covered with snow. And outside they found Hillel, half frozen with the cold and quite unconscious. He was, of course, taken down, and, although it was the Sabbath, the good Rabbis kindled a fire, prepared a hot bath, and rubbed him with oil. Hillel soon revived with warmth and food, and the Rabbis remarked, as they placed him before the fire: "Surely such an one must be worth our breaking the Sabbath, for the young man will keep many Sabbaths in return for the one which is broken for him now." They allowed him henceforward

to attend the school without payment, and they soon discovered how eager Hillel was to study, and how sweet was his character.

Many years afterwards Hillel again came to Jerusalem from Babylon (for he had returned to the land of his birth after that memorable day when he listened, amid the falling flakes of snow, through the window of the House of Study). It was Passover time, and that year the eve of the festival fell on the Sabbath. The Rabbis were discussing whether, in the circumstances, the Sabbath would be broken if the Paschal lamb were offered. But they could not make up their minds, for they had forgotten what the law on the subject really was, as such an incident had not occurred within the memory of any of them. At last some one said: "A man is come up from Babylon, and 'Hillel the Babylonian' is his name. He is a pupil of the great Rabbis, Shemaiah and Abtalion. Let us ask him, for he must know whether we are allowed to do this or not." But the Rabbis laughed and said: "Will this Babylonian be able to help us?" (In those days the men of Palestine had a great contempt for those who lived in Babylon.) However, Hillel was brought in, and the question was put to him. He replied: "Surely there is not one Passover alone in the year that puts aside the Sabbath: there are many such." Of course what he meant was that, just as the usual public offerings were made on the Sabbath as on other days, this might be done with the Paschal lamb on the Sabbath before Passover as well.

But the Rabbis laughed again, saying: "Did not we say, 'There is no hope from this Babylonian?' Fancy his saying that there is more than one Passover in the year!" Hillel then tried to reason the matter out with the Heads of the Sanhedrin. But this was all in vain, and they would not accept the clever arguments. At last he told them that he had the Law from his teachers, Shemaiah and Abtalion, and it was only then that they accepted the tradition. They realised that Hillel possessed far greater knowledge of the Law than any of them, and so they resigned their positions, and appointed him as Head of the Sanhedrin in their stead. The members of this great council were not required to be rich or to belong to a

*"Many  
Passovers."*

*"No hope  
from this  
Babylonian."*

great family. But, whether they were rich or poor, they had to be very wise and very good as well, and Hillel possessed both these qualities. He did not become proud in consequence of this appointment. On the contrary, he said he was very sorry that they had to appoint a man from Babylon to the important post, when they might have had an opportunity of studying under the great Rabbis, Shemaiah and Abtalion, in their own city. They might thus have acquired the same knowledge that he possessed. "It is not because I am cleverer than you," said the humble Rabbi, "that I have been appointed Head of the Sanhedrin, but because you have not had opportunities which fortune placed in my path."

*Hillel's  
"golden  
rule."*

Hillel gave utterance to many famous sayings. But that by which he is best known is his "golden rule." A man came to him, and, wishing to scoff at religion with its many rules, challenged Hillel to teach him the whole of Judaism whilst he stood on one foot, that is to say, by reducing it to a few simple principles. Hillel was never angry, and never rejected people who appeared to ask foolish questions. He would try and turn their folly to profitable account. On this occasion, too, the great Rabbi was equal to his questioner, and replied: "Do not unto others what thou wouldst not have done to thyself. That is the whole law. All else is explanation. Go now and learn it." Hillel was thus able pithily to express what Judaism has always taught, both before his time and since. He followed the old command in the Bible: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart . . . Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Lev. xix. 17, 18).

*"Separate not  
thyself from  
the com-  
munity."*

"Separate not thyself from the community" was another of Hillel's sayings—"do not be of those who astonish people by their doings, by acting contrary to the general rule." He was thus anxious that his people should cling together, in order that their faith might be preserved. By his maxim Hillel taught, too, the lesson that it is not wise or proper to appear conspicuous, to indulge in vain display, to behave differently from others unnecessarily, or to be unduly "cranky" or peculiar. For this, the Rabbis taught, makes a man's neighbour think that he wishes to

push himself forward, and be boastful and vain. "Moreover," they said, "man should regard himself as part of the whole community when he acts, and not merely as having only himself to consider." This lesson naturally followed from Hillel's "golden rule." The saying meant, also, that a rich man or a scholar should not separate himself from those who are not so wealthy or learned and despise them. Rather should he desire to share his riches and knowledge with others, who are not so fortunate as to possess either.

Hillel had an implicit faith in the doctrine that punishment was meted out to every one who did wrong. He once saw the skull of a dead man floating on the water, and thus addressed it: "Because thou didst drown others, they have drowned thee; and those that drowned thee shall in turn be drowned." The following saying shows that Hillel loved study for its own sake, and not for what it brought him: "He who adds not to his learning diminishes it. He who studies not deserves death. But he who uses the 'crown of the Law' for his own ends shall perish." Study, in his view, must be constant and unselfish, and not used for purposes of gain or self-advancement. Moreover, if a man only learns a little and does not continually add to his stock of knowledge, he will soon forget the little he once learnt. "He who makes a name destroys a name" was another of Hillel's maxims. By this he meant that he who "makes a name," and becomes rich and famous, not so much by reason of his learning, but because of his pushfulness and boasting, destroys his name for modesty, humility, and unselfishness.

One day a heathen came to Hillel, and asked in what the Jewish Law consisted. Hillel replied that it was partly written, and part of it had been handed down by word of mouth. The heathen said he believed in the first part, but not in the second. He would, therefore, become a Jew on condition that Hillel taught him only the former and not the latter part of the Law. Hillel agreed to this condition, and commenced to teach him the Hebrew alphabet in the usual way. The second day he taught him the alphabet backwards, reading א as ת, ב as ש, &c. The heathen was puzzled and said: "But yesterday you told me something different." "Yes," replied Hillel, "but did you not rely upon my statement as to which letter was א

*The "crown  
of the Law."*

*Aleph Beth  
backwards.*



and which  $\pi$ ?" "Yes," was the answer. "In the same way," said Hillel, "you must rely on those wise teachers who explain the Law, and whose opinions have been handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth." Hillel thus emphasised the impossibility of understanding the Bible without the help of explanation handed down by the leading men in each generation, and also the necessity of learning from a teacher in whom confidence can be placed.

*Appropriate  
charity.*

Hillel's generosity and his love for his fellow-men, which gave rise to his "golden rule," were shown in many ways. His charity would be fitted to the station of life in which a man was placed. He gave a horse one day to a poor man to ride upon. To a man, however, who was once wealthy, but had become reduced in circumstances, he gave, in addition to a horse and carriage, a slave to run in front of the carriage (which was the custom with rich people). Rather than they should be without their accustomed luxuries, which had become necessities to them, Jewish law provided that, if the funds were forthcoming and the circumstances demanded it, the habits of a man or woman should be taken into consideration in providing relief for their "necessities." Hillel's charity was prompted by his remembrance of the time when he only earned a denar a day in his youth in Jerusalem. He certainly "loved his neighbour," if any one in this world ever did.

*Hillel at  
home.*

The same spirit of kindness must have prevailed in Hillel's house. For we are told that one day a poor man came to Hillel's wife asking for something to eat. She was just preparing a meal for her husband and a guest who was to accompany him; but, without a moment's hesitation, she gave the poor man, who seemed so hungry and ill-clad, the food which she was making ready for Hillel and his guest, and commenced to prepare another meal for them. When her husband duly arrived home, and found that the expected meal was not ready, he said to his wife: "How is it, my dear wife, with thy usual skill and punctuality, that our repast is not prepared?" She replied: "It would have been ready for thee, my beloved husband, but this afternoon a poor man came to me, and begged for food. I, therefore, gave him of that which I had prepared for thee, and at once commenced to make ready another

meal. I hope that what I have done is pleasing in thine eyes." Then Hillel, who loved his wife, but loved a kindly action as well, said to her, with a look of pleasure and admiration in his eyes: "Thou hast done aright, my good wife. We can wait for our food, and could have even done without it altogether. I am glad that thou didst not suffer the poor, starving man to go hungry from Hillel's house. May the Lord bless thee!" We are not surprised that Hillel was so pleased, for his wife had been carrying out his own "golden rule" of kindness and charity to others.

Hillel was always practising and preaching peace and trust in God. One day, as on approaching his house, he heard a noise as of weeping, he expressed in the words of the Psalmist ("He shall not be afraid of evil tidings"—Psalm cxii. 7) his confidence that the noise could not have come from *his* house, for there everything and everybody were always at peace. His trust in God was so great that, whereas his colleague Shammai began to provide for the Sabbath on the preceding Sunday, Hillel again quoted the Psalmist, saying, "Blessed be the Lord, who *daily* loadeth us with benefits" (Psalm lxxviii. 19). Although it was a good thing to be provident and look ahead, said Hillel, it was not necessary to push this too far, for then one would forget altogether about that confidence in God, which was so real a thing to him. "Be of the disciples of Aaron—love peace, and seek to make peace between others, love mankind, and thus lead them to the Law," was one of Hillel's maxims. His successors explained it by saying: "One should love to see peace in Israel, and peace everywhere, as Aaron loved peace, of whom it is written: 'The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with Me in peace and equity, and did turn away many from iniquity' (Mal. ii. 6)."

Hillel often tried to induce people to study the Law. One day he stood at the gate of Jerusalem, and watched the people as they went to their work. "How much," he asked, "will you earn to-day?" One said, "A denar"; another, "Two denars." "What will you do with the money?" he inquired. "We will provide for the necessities of life," was the reply. "Then," said Hillel,

*Preaching  
peace.*

*At the gate  
of Jerusalem.*

"would you not rather come and make the Torah your possession, so that you may possess both this world and the future world?" Hillel was never too great or proud to speak to the most ignorant and lowly of the common people in the streets, and he was, in this way, often able to do good.



Æ





HADRIAN

From a bust found at Antium  
(Museum of the Capitol)



## CHAPTER II

### HILLEL (*continued*)

THE great teacher was a model of patience, gentleness, and humility, and "Be gentle as Hillel" was a proverb used long afterwards. "My humility is my exaltation; my exaltation is my humility" was one of his sayings. He meant, of course, that the humbler he was the higher and more exalted was he in the sight of God; the higher his position as a scholar and leader of the community, the more necessary was it to show that a man could occupy a high place in society, and yet be modest and humble. If, however, he was haughty and boasted of his scholarship, he would be degraded in the sight of God and man.

*"My humility is my exaltation."*

On one occasion a man had a wager with a friend that he would make Hillel angry. He came to the Rabbi, when he had just entered a bath, crying, "Where is Hillel? where is Hillel?" without giving him any title (which was, of course, very disrespectful). Hillel immediately wrapped himself in a cloak, gave audience to the man, and politely asked what he could do, whereupon his interrupter put to him the following foolish question: "Why have the Babylonians round heads?" (this was an insulting as well as a foolish question, for Hillel was a Babylonian). "An important question, surely," answered Hillel. "The reason is because they have no experienced nurses." The man came again, crying, "Where is Hillel?" "What dost thou want, my son?" said the Rabbi. "I want to know why the Tadmorians have weak eyes?" Hillel answered: "Because they live in a sandy country; the sand flies into their eyes and causes soreness." The man, perceiving Hillel's mildness and good-nature, went away despondent. But, resolving to make another effort to provoke him, he came again in an hour, calling

*A wager.*

out: "Where is Hillel? I want Hillel." "What is thy pleasure now?" said the meek Rabbi. "I want to know," replied the man, "why the Africans have broad feet?" "Because," replied the sage, "they live in a marshy land."

*The wager  
lost.*

"I would like to ask many more questions," said the man, "but I fear thou wilt be angry." "Fear nothing," said the Rabbi; "ask as many questions as it pleaseth thee, and I will answer them if I can." The man, astonished at Hillel's unruffled temper, and fearing to lose his money, thought that his only chance was to insult him to his face. With this end in view, he said to the Rabbi: "Art thou the Hillel who is styled 'the Prince of the Israelites'?" Hillel replied that this was so. "Well then," said the man, "if that is so, may Israel not produce many persons like thee." "And why not?" replied the sweet-natured Rabbi. "Because," said the stranger, "I have lost 400 zuzim." "Thy money is not entirely lost," said Hillel with a smile, "because it will teach thee to be more prudent in the future, and not to make such foolish wagers. Besides, it is better that thou lose thy money than that Hillel should lose his patience."

*A curious  
condition.*

A heathen came to Hillel one day, and told him that he would become a Jew on condition that he was appointed High Priest. With his unfailing gentleness and good-humour Hillel told the heathen that he agreed to the condition, but that it was impossible to fill a post without knowing something of the duties and laws attaching to it. "You will therefore," he said, "have to learn the Jewish Law." The heathen thereupon began to study the Bible. When he came to the passage: "And the stranger that cometh nigh to serve in the tabernacle shall be put to death" (Num. i. 51), he asked Hillel what was meant by the word "stranger." Hillel replied that it included every one who did not belong to the priestly family, even if it were King David. Then the man thought to himself: "If all other Israelites are excluded from exercising priestly duties, how can I become High Priest?" So he gave up his ambitious desire, and said to Hillel humbly: "Beloved master, may blessings come upon thy head, for thou hast brought me under the wings of Heaven."

The following further sayings of his illustrate Hillel's whole teaching: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And being for my own self alone, what am I? And if not now, when then?" He thus taught that man's merit depends on his own good deeds, although at the best he is not likely to achieve all that God expects from him (for "What am I?"). But there is no time to waste, says the Rabbi; do not put off till to-morrow what can be done to-day, for the days of life are short ("If not now, when then?"). And, if a man does not strive after goodness for himself while he is alive, no one can do so for him after he is dead ("If I am not for myself, who will be for me?"). In the troublous times in which he lived the people were divided into parties, each of which proclaimed religious and political doctrines of a different character, and gave expression to various shades of opinion, often breaking out into open hostility. Between these shades of opinion Hillel stood like a rock in the midst of a tempest, unmoved by passion, and untouched by all the party influences that surrounded him. It was then that there fell from his lips the golden words of wisdom: "In a place where there are no good men, do thou endeavour to be a man." A wise man himself, we are not surprised that one of Hillel's favourite sayings was, "Happy is he that findeth wisdom." "Learn where there are teachers, and teach where there are learners" was a motto for all teachers and pupils in all ages. "Judge not thy neighbour till thou art in his place" was a lesson in charity of judgment.

*Teaching self-reliance and unselfishness.*

One day Hillel's pupils, at the close of his lecture, went a part of their journey home with him. It was part of a Jewish student's course of study in those days to accompany his teacher everywhere, and watch closely, not only his words, but his ways, and, indeed, his every act; for a Rabbi was supposed to take a pride in doing nothing without deliberation. The pupils asked Hillel where he was going. "I am going to perform a holy duty," he replied. "Tell us, Master," they then asked, "what this duty is." "I am about to bathe myself in the bath-house," said Hillel. Full of curiosity, they then said to him: "Is that a religious duty?" "Yes, indeed," was Hillel's reply. "If the statues of the kings, which are placed in the

*A holy duty.*

theatre and circus, must be kept clean and washed by a man who is specially appointed and paid to do this work, how much more should I, who have been created in the image of God, keep my body clean?" Cleanliness of body and thought was in Hillel's time, as it is to-day, an important part of the Jewish religion.

*An important guest.*

Then Hillel went on to say: "I must hurry along now because I have to attend to a guest in my house." The pupils were again curious and asked: "Hast thou, then, every day a guest in thy house?" Hillel replied: "My soul is my guest. For to-day it is here; to-morrow it may no longer be with me. I therefore wish, while there is still time, to look after it by study and prayer and good actions. But I cannot attend to my guest unless I also care for myself, and so, if I wish to have a clear brain and a good heart, I must refresh my body by a bath and a meal." The Romans expressed the idea that health of body and mind go very much together in a similar way by the phrase: "*Mens sana in corpore sano.*"

*Putting the Law into order.*

Apart, however, from his noble character, Hillel will always be remembered as having done a great deal to put the traditional law as handed down by the Rabbis into proper order. He commenced the work of collecting and arranging it, and his knowledge of it was so great that his opinion on any difficult point was accepted almost without question. He framed rules which made it possible to explain the existing laws, and he was always on the side of those who wished to make them reasonable. He would abide by the spirit of the Law, when strict adherence to its very letter would mean unreasonable severity or inconvenience. Hillel's knowledge was not, however, confined to the Law. It was said that there was no language that he and his disciples did not know, and he was familiar (as the story tells of Solomon) with the talk of the mountains, the valleys, and the trees, of the beasts and of the fields. It was in this picturesque way that the Rabbis spoke when they meant that a man was conversant with nature study.

*Reasonable rules.*

Hillel's rules, by which the Bible laws were to be explained, partly healed the differences between the Pharisees and Sadducees. The latter could no longer say that the traditional law which had been handed down was something independent of the Bible, as the connection between



the explanation and the text was now made clear for all, and according to rules which every one could understand. One example of Hillel's explanations will show the nature of his teaching. There was a law (in Deut. xv. 1-2) that in every seven years creditors should make their debtors a present of the money owing to them. "At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called 'the Lord's release.'" At this time the rule pressed rather hardly on both the lenders of money and on the poor, as people would not lend any money at all when the seventh year approached. This did not matter so much when Palestine was an agricultural country, and no money was required. But now that the land was becoming more the centre of commerce, and loans were frequent, the law became a hardship. Hillel, therefore, arranged that the lender should transfer his claim to the Beth Din. In this way the lender gave up his debt, as the law required, but he in fact was still able to recover his money if he wished. For, by handing the debt over to the Beth Din, it was considered that the money was now owing to God, and that it was a matter of honour (as well as of law) for the borrower to repay it as soon as he could. The arrangement was called a *prosbul*.

Hillel's chief colleague on the Sanhedrin was named Shammai. After a time both Hillel and Shammai had followers, and each of these tried to imitate his master. Thus, the Hillelites were, like the founder of their school, quiet, peace-loving men, accommodating themselves to varying circumstances and times. They desired to make the Law practical and reasonable, and suited to the requirements of everyday life, their aim being to bring man nearer to his God and his neighbour. The Shammaites, on the other hand, were stern and severe in their decisions, like their master, although they received every one in a cheerful manner. To them it seemed impossible to be too strict in religious regulations. And this was why the Hillelites were followed in all their actions, except in three cases, and in these the Shammaites adopted the milder and more reasonable course. In the tumultuous and unsettled times

*The "schools" of Hillel and Shammai.*



that followed, the students of the Law could not devote mind and time to study fully and deeply enough. In earlier times every now and then matters in dispute were settled by national assemblies, but in the warlike period to which we are now referring such congresses were impossible. And so it came about that the differences increased till it was said that there were two Laws instead of one—one laid down by the school of Hillel, and one established by the school of Shammai.

*How the  
"Shema" may  
be said.*

Some of Shammai's sayings have also come down to us, and the following is one: "Have a fixed period for the study of the Law; promise little and do much, and receive every one with a cheerful countenance." Two instances of the disputes between the two schools of Hillel and Shammai may serve as typical of them all. A discussion arose as to how the *Shema* should be recited. The disciples of Shammai held that in the evening it was proper to say the *Shema* lying down, and in the morning standing up, so that the words of the command: "And thou shalt talk of them . . . when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" could be literally fulfilled. But the school of Hillel said: "No, *saying* the *Shema* is the important thing. It does not matter so much in what attitude a man is when he says it, so long as he *does* recite it, and prays to God earnestly. Even a workman picking fruit on the top of a tree may put down his basket, and a bricklayer may lay down his bricks on the scaffolding, and say: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One!'" The school of Shammai said: "The Law should be imparted preferably to men of wisdom, of modesty, of good family, and of some independence." The school of Hillel, on the other hand, said: "Let it be imparted to all men: for there were many transgressors in Israel who were encouraged to study the Law, and who became the parents of righteous, holy, and virtuous men." The followers of Hillel in this way adopted a broader view of life, and did not wish to confine instruction to those who were already learned or rich.

*Hillel's death.*

Hillel's death was received by the whole nation with mourning, and at his graveside the people cried: "O pious, O gentle one, O worthy follower of Ezra!" Hillel's gentle, unselfish, noble life may well introduce to us the "Heroes of the Talmud." Not only has his teaching enriched

Jewish literature, but many people think that it has influenced other religions as well, and thus has had a far-reaching effect on the history of mankind. Hillel died nearly two thousand years ago. Eloquent as was his teaching, his life was even more so, and the record of his sublime character will remain an example for ever.



## CHAPTER III

10 B.C.—90 C.E.

### II. JOCHANAN BEN ZAKKAI. יוֹחָנָן בֶּן־זַכַּי

*The "father  
of wisdom."*

THE Talmud might never have been put together if it had not been for the courage and foresight of Rabban Jochanan ben Zakkai, who was one of the first of a large number of famous men who have been called *Tannaim* (or "reciters" of the Mishna), most of whom lived and taught after the destruction of the Temple. Rabban Jochanan



COIN STRUCK AFTER THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

*Obverse*:—Hebrew word "Jerusalem," with figure of one of the Gates of the Temple. *Reverse*:—Hebrew words: "First year of the captivity of Israel." An *Ethrog* and *Lulab*.

was the youngest of Hillel's pupils. But, although he was only a young man at the time of Hillel's death, his famous master had prophesied that he would be the greatest of them all. For he was the "father of wisdom" and "the father of coming generations."

*Rabban  
Jochanan's  
advice.*

In the last struggle of Judea against Rome Rabban Jochanan, from his seat in the open street, under the shadow of the Temple, had advised his people not to continue the hopeless contest. When he saw, however, what

the end was likely to be, he resolved that, come what might, the religion and Law of the Jews should not perish even if the Temple were destroyed and Judea laid waste. Whilst the various parties in Jerusalem were quarrelling, and the Romans were pressing hard upon the city, Rabban Jochanan made up his mind to leave Jerusalem and try to establish a school elsewhere, where the Law could be taught and preserved.

He sent a message to the Roman camp, by means of a piece of paper tied to an arrow, that he was about to escape from Jerusalem, and he was afterwards carried by his pupils in a coffin outside the city to the enemy's lines. He had previously spread a report that he was ill, so that the report of his death did not come altogether as a surprise. At the gate of Jerusalem the guards wanted to test whether Rabban Jochanan was really dead, because he would not have been allowed to leave the city if they thought he was still alive. They therefore asked the pupils who were carrying the coffin to stab the body and shake the coffin. The pupils refused to do this, however, saying it was disrespectful for them so to act towards their dead master. When he arrived at the Roman camp, Rabban Jochanan emerged from his coffin and asked to see Vespasian, the Roman general.

He was then brought before Vespasian, and said : "Hail, O Emperor ! Peace be with thee, O King !" The General replied, angrily : "You deserve to be killed twice, for you are making fun of me and you are telling a lie. You know that I am not Emperor, for there is an Emperor at Rome. But, if I am Emperor, as you say, why have you not come to me before ?" "With regard to thy first point," replied Rabban Jochanan, "that thou art not Emperor, in truth thou art an Emperor. It is said in the Bible that 'Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one' (Isaiah x. 34). 'Lebanon' means the Temple, and the 'mighty one' is an Emperor. As I know that Jerusalem is certain to fall into thy hands, it is clear that thou must be the Roman Emperor. With regard to the question, why I have not come to see thee before, the revolutionaries among us have not permitted me to do so."

A messenger at this moment came to Vespasian with the news that the Emperor had died, and that he had been

*He escapes in a coffin.*

*Vespasian angry.*

*Jochanan's three requests.*



proclaimed in his stead ruler of the Roman Empire. The new Emperor then said to Rabban Jochanan: "Since you are so very wise, why did you not succeed with the people of Jerusalem, and come to me before?" "Have I not given thee the answer?" replied Jochanan. "There were in the city wicked people, who would not listen to me." "I have also answered your answer," said Vespasian. "But I am going back to Rome to be crowned Emperor, and I shall send another general in my place. Ask some favour of me before I go, and I will grant it." Jochanan replied by making three requests: "Save the



COIN ISSUED UNDER THE ROMAN EMPEROR VESPASIAN

*Obverse* :—Greek words with name of the Emperor. Head of Vespasian, laureated. *Reverse* :—Deity holding ears of corn.

vineyard of Jabneh and its wise men from destruction. Spare the family of Rabban Gamliel. Give me a doctor who will heal Rabbi Zadok."

*Why Jochanan went to Jabneh.*

Jabneh was a city on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, where a small school already existed. Rabban Jochanan wished to enlarge this, and thus preserve Judaism by teaching the Law, whatever might be the fate of Jerusalem and its Temple. Rabban Jochanan's school at Jabneh was ever afterwards called "the Vineyard of Jabneh," the "wine" produced there being the wise words of the sages, who gathered the "grapes" containing the words of the Law. Rabban Gamliel was a member of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. Jochanan felt that, if Gamliel and his family were spared at the approaching capture of the city, this would help to preserve the Sanhedrin from destruction as well. Rabbi Zadok was a man who was said to have fasted for forty years, and prayed for the preservation of



Jerusalem and the Temple: he had naturally become very ill. Jochanan, with that sympathy and charity which were part of the lives of all the Rabbis of the Talmud, thought that it would be an act of kindness to procure a doctor to cure this poor man, and succeeded in doing so. The Roman general, not suspecting that the founding of a school in the unimportant town of Jabneh, far away from Jerusalem, would be the means of preserving Judaism for all time, readily consented to Jochanan's modest requests. To Jabneh, therefore, the Rabbi went, and gathered round him a number of sages and pupils. The school became the centre for learning in Palestine, in the same way as Jerusalem had been. Sitzings of the Sanhedrin took place there, and the teaching of the Law was continued as of old.

The beautiful motto of the teachers of Jabneh in later years is a fitting monument to the humble lives and teachings of Hillel and his pupil, Rabban Jochanan, the founder of the school. "I am the creature of God," they said, "and so is my fellow-man; my calling is in the town, and his in the fields; I go early to my work and he to his; he does not boast of his labour nor I of mine; and if thou wouldst say, 'I accomplish great things, and he little things,' we have learnt that, whether a man accomplish great things or small, his reward is the same if only his heart be set upon Heaven."

*A beautiful motto.*

Rabban Jochanan was fond of praising his great teacher Hillel, and he said that if all the sky became parchment, all the trees pens, all the seas ink, and all men scribes, this would not be sufficient to describe the knowledge that he had learnt from his teacher. But, even with all the assistance and teaching Hillel had given him, he had only taken from that wise man as much as a fly, dipping its body into the ocean, took from the water contained in it.

*If all the sky became parchment!*

One day he asked his five principal pupils what they thought was most useful to a man throughout life. One of them said, "A good eye"; another, "A good friend"; a third, "A good neighbour"; a fourth, "One who has foresight." But the answer which pleased him most was that of his favourite disciple, Eleazar ben Arach, who replied that "a good heart" was the most important thing one could possess, for in this all the other things his colleagues had mentioned were included. A man with a good heart

*A good heart.*

would be a good friend, a good neighbour, &c. Rabban Jochanan must himself have had the good heart which he recommended to his pupils. For he was fond of saying: "It is as pleasing in God's sight to be kind and hospitable to strangers as to rise up early to study His law"—because it was in fact putting God's law into practice. Another saying of his was: "He who is always busy in acts of kindness towards his fellow-creatures is forgiven his sins." We thus see that Hillel's "golden rule" of kindness and charity, "Do not unto others what thou wouldst not have done unto thyself," was reflected in the teachings of his successors.

*A new kind of sacrifice.*

The sacrifices of the Temple were gone, but Rabban Jochanan comforted his people in Jabneh by telling them that "righteousness exalteth a nation" (Prov. xiv. 34), and that in future loving-kindness and charity were to be their sin-offering. To a Rabbi, who was weeping amid the ruins of the Temple, Jochanan said: "My son, be not grieved, for we have an atonement as effectual as that of the Temple." "And what is that?" asked the other. "Righteousness!" was Rabban Jochanan's reply. "For hath not the Prophet said: 'I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings' (Hosea vi. 6)?" This was Rabban Jochanan's inspiring answer to the weeping and lamentation for the burnt Temple and the captured city. The Jewish people now had a mission to perform in the world. Their sacrifices were to be sacrifices of self for their faith; their offerings were to be offerings of charity and righteousness among the peoples of the world.



## CHAPTER IV

### JOCHANAN BEN ZAKKAI (*continued*)

SOMETIMES Jochanan would remind the people that they themselves were partly to blame for their troubles. One day, during the siege of Jerusalem, he saw a young Jewess, whose father had been a very rich man, picking up grains of barley dropped in the roadway by the horses as they ate, in order to appease her hunger. As soon as she espied the Rabbi, she veiled herself with her hair, and accosted him thus: "O Rabbi! assist me." "Whose daughter art thou, my child?" asked the Rabbi. She replied: "The daughter of Nicodemus ben Guryon." "But what has become of thy father's fortune?" asked Rabban Jochanan. "Ah!" said she, "is it not a saying in Jerusalem, 'Salt thy money with charity' (that is to say, to preserve one's money one must diminish it by devoting part of it to charity)? As my father did not spend sufficient in charity, it all vanished." "And what has become of all the money thou hadst as a dowry from thy father-in-law?" inquired the Rabbi. "Alas!" said the young woman, "one sum devoured the other. His money was also lost through my father."

*"Salt your money with charity!"*

"Rabbi," she went on, "dost thou recollect signing my marriage contract?" "Yes," he said, turning to his disciples, "I well remember having signed it; it told of a million golden denarii from her father, besides a goodly sum from her father-in-law. It is related of her father that, when he went from his house to the academy, the road was carpeted with Milesian cloth, and after he had passed over it poor people rolled it up and took it away. It might be said that he did this in order to gratify his vanity. But, even if he did this really to benefit the poor, it was

*A generous dowry.*

not enough for him to give, for he was exceedingly rich ; and the saying is, ' According to the strength of the camel should be the weight of its burden.' " Speaking thus, Rabban Jochanan wept. " Blessed art thou, O Israel," he said, " when thou doest the will of the Almighty, for then no nation can rule over thee. But, when thou doest not the will of God, He delivereth thee over to a strange nation ; and not only so, but He actually maketh thee dependent upon the very beasts."

*The moral of the grains of barley.*

Rabban Jochanan used this incident as a text for an address to the people, blaming them for their past neglect. " You did not wish," he said, " to submit to God ; hence you are made subject to foreign peoples. You did not pay God the holy tax of half a shekel for each person ; now you pay fifteen to the government of your enemies. You did not wish to repair the roads and streets for the festivals ; you must now repair the watch-towers and forts on the roadside by which your oppressors keep guard over you. And in you is fulfilled the prophecy : ' Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness and with gladness of heart, by reason of the abundance of all things, therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies, which the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things ' (Deut. xxviii. 47-48)."

*An observant slave.*

The story is told of Rabban Jochanan that he was travelling once with two Jewish slaves, and in the course of the journey overheard one saying to the other : " There is a camel ahead of us. I have not seen it, but it is blind of one eye, and is laden with two skin bottles, one of which contains oil, and the other wine. There are two drivers, one of whom is an Israelite, and the other a Gentile." The Rabbi asked how he knew this. The slave answered : " Although I have not seen what I have described, yet I know the camel is blind in one eye, because the grass is cropped on only one side of the track. The wine, which the travellers must have carried, is soaked into the earth on the right, and the oil has trickled down, and can be seen on the left. One of the drivers, who is, I think, an Israelite, has obeyed the rule to turn aside from the path, and throw away water that is not needed. The other has not even left the road for the purpose.



Upon this, Rabban Jochanan pressed forward, in order to see if the slave's statement was correct. On finding it was true in every respect, he returned, and, after complimenting the slave on his shrewdness, at once gave him his liberty. The Rabbi afterwards used to tell the story in advising his pupils always to be observant, both in the country and the town—to note the beautiful flowers, the grand trees, and the sweet-singing birds of the country, and the fine buildings and other things of interest to be found in cities. In other words, he wanted the boys and girls of his day to admire the beautiful things they saw around them, and to use that wonderful part of their bodies—their eyes—to the best possible advantage. *Using one's eyes.*

Rabban Jochanan ben Zakkai imitated his teacher Hillel in teaching the virtue of humility. One of his mottoes was: "If thou hast learned much of the Torah, do not take credit for it, for this was the purpose for which thou wast created." It was said of him, too, that, so careful was he not to waste a moment of his life, he never spoke an idle word; he did not walk four yards without thinking about the Torah and without his tephillin; no one ever entered the House of Learning before him; and he was always the last to leave. He was polite, too, for it was said of him that no man ever greeted him first, not even a stranger in the market-place. *Humility and politeness.*

Although he was far away from Jerusalem, where his advice had not been heeded, Rabban Jochanan continued to preach peace between all men. "If," he said, "God commanded that no iron should be employed over the stones of the altar, which can neither see, nor hear, nor speak, because they are intended to procure peace between Israel and their Father in Heaven, how much more shall God's blessing be upon every one who makes peace between man and his wife, family and family, city and city, nation and nation, kingdom and kingdom?" *Peace.*

The Rabbi was very much grieved when he lost his son, who was only eighteen years old. His pupils came to condole with him. One of them spoke of the death of Abel and Adam's grief; another, of the unhappiness and sufferings of Job; a third, of the consolation of Aaron when his two sons died on the same day; a fourth, of the sorrow of David at the death of his child. But these did not *A King and his treasures.*



soothe him. "How should the sufferings of others make *my* loss any the less?" he said. Then one of his pupils comforted him by telling him the following parable: A King once had some treasure entrusted to him for safe-keeping, and he was very much worried, whilst the treasure was in his possession, lest any of it should be stolen or injured. He was, accordingly, much relieved to find, when the time came for restoring the treasure to the owner, that it was uninjured. "Should not you rejoice too," said the pupil to the old Rabbi, "that *your* treasure was in such perfect condition when you had to return it—that your son, by means of your teaching and example, was such a noble son of Israel, when he was summoned by his Maker?" And so the Rabbi was comforted in his grief by this touching description of his loss.

*A parting  
blessing.*

Rabban Jochanan died, it is said, at the advanced age of one hundred years. When he was on his death-bed, his pupils asked for a blessing. Rabban Jochanan replied by saying: "May it be God's will that the fear of Heaven be as strong in you as the fear of man!" "What!" said his pupils, "do you desire that we should not fear God more than man?" "I should be well content," answered the wise old Rabbi, "if you showed by your actions that you feared Him as much. If we are about to do wrong, do we not often look around us to make sure we are alone, and, if any one is likely to see us, do we not desist? Show then the same fear of God, who always sees."

*The meaning  
of tears.*

As his pupils approached his bedside, Rabban Jochanan broke into tears. His pupils asked him why he cried. "If I were to appear," he said, "before a King of flesh and blood, before a King who is here to-day and to-morrow in the grave, whose anger, if he is angry with me, is no permanent anger, and whose chains, if he put me in chains, are no everlasting chains, and whose death, if he kills me, is no eternal death, a King who can be persuaded with words and bribed with gold—before such a man I would weep. And now, when I am about to appear before the King of Kings, the Holy One—blessed be He!—who lives and remains for ever in all eternity, whom I cannot persuade with words or bribe with gold, shall I not then weep?"



ANTONINUS

(Bust in the Museum of Naples)



No man did more than Rabban Jochanan ben Zakkai *Rabban Jochanan's task.* to make it possible for Israel, broken in spirit and sad at heart, with her country laid waste and her Sanctuary destroyed, to rise again from "the Vineyard of Jabneh," and offer her sacrifice of loving-kindness and charity to the world.



## CHAPTER V

40-130 C.E.

### III. JOSHUA BEN CHANANYA. יְהוֹשֻעַ בֶּן-חַנְנִיָּא

*At Synagogue  
in a cradle.*

RABBI JOSHUA BEN CHANANYA was one of the most prominent of the Rabbis who lived during the fifty years after the destruction of the Temple. He was a Levite, and had served in the Temple as one of the choristers in the Sanctuary. His mother had intended him from his birth for a life of study, and she carried her child in his cradle into the Synagogue, so that his ears might become accustomed to the sound of the words of the Torah. Joshua was one of the five principal disciples of Rabban Jochanan ben Zakkai, and was one of the two pupils who bore their master in the coffin out of Jerusalem into the Roman camp during the siege.

*Too much  
grief.*

He followed the humble occupations of a maker of needles and charcoal-burner, but notwithstanding this lowly calling he was skilled in science, and was an astronomer. When the Temple was destroyed, he tried to check an undue display of grief on the part of the people, some of whom refused to eat meat or drink wine because these were no longer used in the Temple sacrifices. But Joshua pointed out that, on the same principle, they should not eat figs or grapes, since the first-fruits were no longer offered; or even bread and water, as the festival of the drawing of the water had been discontinued, and the Temple showbread was no longer displayed. Their self-denial, he told them, was unnecessary, and, if it unfitted them for their daily duties, it was wrong. For then their self-denial would become selfishness, as they would be so much absorbed in their own grief that they could not do their duty to others. His mild and temperate nature caused Rabbi Joshua to be opposed to all exaggerations



and extremes of this kind, and he bitterly opposed the severe regulations of the school of Shammai, saying on one occasion that the latter had "overstepped" the boundary of what reasonable people could carry out.

Rabbi Joshua adopted as one of his mottoes, "Be not righteous over-much" (Eccles. vii. 16), and he had great contempt for hypocrites, and people whom he called "sly sinners"—that is to say, people who pretended to be very pious, but who were really wicked. "If people wish to be happy," Rabbi Joshua said, "they must possess the qualities of temperance and love of mankind." He taught the importance of being kind and attentive to one's fellows, and he impressed upon his pupils the lessons that hypocrisy is one of the greatest sins condemned by God and man, and that there is nothing to be compared with straightforwardness, honesty, and the striving with a *true* heart to help others.

One of Rabbi Joshua's sayings was: "An envious eye, evil thoughts, and hatred of his fellow-beings drive a man out of the world," meaning that a man who possessed these undesirable qualities was not fit to live. One of the Rabbi's successors afterwards compared the "evil thoughts" of which he spoke to a piece of iron which is placed in the fire: so long as it is there, and in a molten state, various vessels can be formed out of it; so long, too, as evil thoughts exist in the mind, wrong actions may be committed. "Hatred of fellow beings" was explained as follows: "One should not say, 'Love the sages, but hate the disciples;' or 'Love the disciples, and hate the common people;' but 'Love *everyone* except those that are wicked,' as it is said: 'But thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' (Lev. xix. 18); and: 'If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink' (Prov. xxv. 21)."

His moderation extended to the saying of the daily prayers, and he allowed people to use an abstract of the eighteen Benedictions (*Shemoné Esré*) in certain circumstances. If, for instance, a person was in a place of danger, and was not able to set his mind to prayer, Rabbi Joshua permitted him to offer a shorter prayer than the one usually provided. Recognising that it was impossible for working men to spend much time in studying the Torah, Rabbi

"Sly sinners."

*Love everyone.*

*Shorter prayers.*

Joshua also said that "he who repeats two sentences in the morning and two in the evening, but is engaged in his ordinary occupation for the rest of the day, is reckoned as if he had fulfilled the teaching of the whole Law."

*Rabban  
Gamliel de-  
posed.*

Early in his career Rabbi Joshua had a dispute with Rabban Gamliel, who was Head of the Beth Din. Joshua gave way, as Gamliel was superior to him in position. But the latter, wishing to show his resentment at the occurrence, bade him stand up in the Beth Din "that the people may know that you have expressed an opinion contrary to mine." This insult made the people so angry that they decided to dismiss Rabban Gamliel. A discussion then arose as to who should succeed him. They could not appoint Rabbi Joshua, as he was one of the parties to the dispute. Rabbi Akiba, too, could not be selected, as he was then unmarried. Finally they decided to appoint Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah, because he was a rich man, was tenth in descent from Ezra, and was otherwise a fit and proper person for the post. The only difficulty was that Eleazar was only eighteen years old. But that night, so the story runs, several rows of white hairs grew on his head, and thus Rabbi Eleazar was able to sit as President of the Beth Din.

*The quarrel  
healed.*

It was not long, however, before Rabban Gamliel tried to make peace between himself and Rabbi Joshua. Accordingly he went one day to Joshua's house. He did not, however, commence his conversation very happily, for he made some rude remark about the dirty, black walls of the house, a condition brought about by Joshua's occupation of charcoal-burner. Rabbi Joshua replied: "Woe to the generation whose leader is so indifferent that he does not understand what are the troubles of those who have to earn their living." Gamliel, who was a rich man, was touched by this reply of Rabbi Joshua, and said: "I have sinned against thee. Pardon me for the sake of thy father." Joshua was only too ready to forgive his old friend; they kissed each other, and the quarrel was over. The people then wished to restore Rabban Gamliel, who, after all, was the cleverest man of his time, to his position. Moreover, though he was somewhat disdainful and high-handed in his leadership, yet he was a good and worthy man. They could not, however, dismiss Rabbi Eleazar.

Finally they devised a compromise : Gamliel was to preside three weeks and Eleazar one week out of every four.

Rabbi Joshua seldom allowed people to get the better of him in argument or in wit. The only exceptions are mentioned by Joshua himself. "No person," he said, "ever conquered me in wit except two little boys, a little girl, and a widow. Once, on my travels, I came near a town, where the road separated to the right and the left. Not knowing which to take, I inquired of a little boy which of the two led to the town. 'Both,' replied he, 'but that to the right is short and long; that to the left is long and short.' The boy then ran away out of reach, leaving me puzzled which to take. I chose the road on the right, but had not advanced far when my progress was stopped by a number of hedges and gardens. Being unable to proceed, I returned, and, finding the little fellow again, I asked him how he could be so unkind as to misdirect a stranger. 'I did not misdirect thee,' replied the boy. 'This road is the shorter, but still the longer on account of the many obstructions. The other road is, indeed, less direct; but it is nevertheless the shorter, being a public road.' I admired the lad's wit, and went on."

*The nearest way.*

"On arriving in the city one day," continued the Rabbi, "I met another little boy, carrying a covered dish. 'What hast thou in that dish, child?' I asked. 'My mother would not have covered it, master, if she had been willing that its contents should be known,' replied the little fellow, with rare good sense."

*Curiosity repressed.*

"Another time, during my travels," Rabbi Joshua went on, "I came near a well, where a young girl was drawing water. Being very thirsty, I asked for a draught. She handed me the pitcher. 'Drink,' said she, 'and when thou hast done, I will draw some for the beast on which thou ridest.' I quenched my thirst, and the good girl gave some to the poor animal. As I departed, I said: 'Daughter of Israel, thou hast imitated the virtuous example of our good mother Rebekkah.' 'Rabbi,' said the young girl, with a smile that indicated the most kindly feelings, and showed that the reply was a mere playful retort, 'if I have imitated the example of Rebekkah, thou hast not imitated that of the faithful Eliezer' [of

*A kind and witty girl.*

whom the Bible said, 'The man took a golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight, of gold' (Gen. xxiv. 22)]. 'Kind maiden,' said I, 'thou possessest already more beautiful ornaments than the most faithful servant can bestow—wit, common sense, and good nature. May the Lord continue to bless thee!'"

*Rabbi Joshua rebuked by a widow.*

"I happened once to take up my lodging at the abode of a widow. She prepared something for my dinner, which she placed before me. Being very hungry, I ate the whole, without leaving something, as was the custom, for the servants. The next day I did the same. On the third day my hostess, wishing to inform me that I had not acted aright, so over-seasoned the dish she had prepared for me that it was impossible to eat it. Ignorant of what had been done, I began to eat. But, finding the food so salty, I laid down the spoon, and made my repast on bread. 'Why eatest thou not?' said my hostess. 'Because I am not hungry,' answered I. 'If that is so, why eatest thou the bread?' 'But,' continued she, with a smile full of meaning, 'I can perhaps guess thy motive. Thou leavest this for the poor servants, whom thou didst yesterday and the day before deprive of their due. Is it not so, Rabbi?' I was humbled, and acknowledged my fault."

*Wisdom in an ugly frame.*

Rabbi Joshua was one of those men whose minds are far more beautiful than their bodies. His occupation often made him look very dirty; his complexion was naturally dark; and he was so plain as almost to frighten children. Yet his great learning, wit, and wisdom procured him not only the love and respect of the people, but even the favour of the Emperor Hadrian at Rome. He was sometimes at the Court, and one of the Princesses chaffed him on one occasion on his want of beauty. "How comes it," she said, "that such glorious wisdom is enclosed in so mean a vessel?" The Rabbi was by no means dismayed by this rude question, and asked the Princess to tell him in what kind of vessel her father kept his wine. "Why, in earthen vessels, to be sure," replied the Princess. "Oh!" exclaimed the witty Rabbi, "that is what ordinary people do. An Emperor's wine ought to be kept in more precious vessels." "And what kind



do you recommend?" she asked. "Silver and gold, of course," replied Joshua. The Princess, thinking he was in earnest, ordered a quantity of wine to be emptied out of the earthen jars into gold and silver vessels. But, to



Obverse

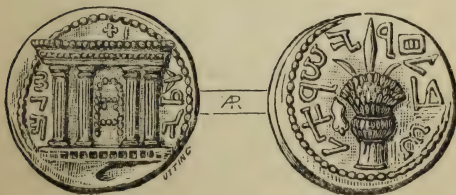
Reverse

COIN OF TRAJAN

*Obverse* :—Latin words with name of Trajan, and his bust.

*Reverse* :—Jupiter with an eagle at his feet.

her great surprise, she found it became in a very short time flat and unfit to drink. "Very fine advice, indeed, Rabbi Joshua, hast thou given me," said the Princess the next time she saw him. "Dost thou know that the wine is sour and spoiled?" "Thou art then convinced," replied the Rabbi, "that wine keeps best in plain and mean vessels. It is even so with wisdom."





## CHAPTER VI

### JOSHUA BEN CHANANYA (*continued*)

*The Emperor  
Hadrian re-  
buked.*

AT the time of the Roman Emperor Hadrian, Rabbi Joshua was the acknowledged leader of the Jewish people, and the Emperor often received him in Rome. One day Hadrian said to the Rabbi: "I am better than your Master, Moses, for I am living and he is dead; as the saying goes, 'A living dog is better than a dead lion.'" Rabbi Joshua replied by asking Hadrian, "Can you compel the inhabitants of the surrounding villages not to kindle fires for the space of three days?" The Emperor told him that nothing was easier, and he immediately gave the order. The first night, Rabbi Joshua led the Emperor on to the terrace of the palace. They saw smoke rising from one of the houses, and Joshua observed to Hadrian: "See! Even during your lifetime you are not obeyed. Moses commanded, however, 'Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day' (Exod. xxxv. 3), and he is still obeyed, so long after his death. How, then, are you better than he?"

*One of God's  
ambassadors.*

On another occasion the Emperor said to Rabbi Joshua in a scoffing tone: "Show me this God, of whom you talk so much. I don't believe He exists at all." "Raise your eyes to the sky," replied the Rabbi, "and I will first show you one of His ambassadors." The Emperor raised his eyes. But, at this moment, the sun poured its rays upon the earth, and the dazzling light soon caused Hadrian to cast his eyes downwards. Thereupon Rabbi Joshua said to him: "What! Would you see the Master, when you have not the power to look one of His servants in the face?"

*A banquet to  
God.*

Hadrian one day suddenly announced to Joshua his intention of giving a banquet to God. Rabbi Joshua

said to him: "But, your Majesty, with all your riches, you will not be able to carry out your desire, for the members of God's Court are very numerous, even as the stars of Heaven and the sand on the sea-shore." Hadrian persisted, however, in his intention, and Joshua then told the Emperor that he ought to prepare the banquet on the sea-shore, so that the sea, one of God's most powerful servants, might partake of it. Hadrian accordingly prepared a repast for thousands of people. The tables were filled with the most costly dishes and the most expensive



COINS STRUCK BY HADRIAN AT ROME

*Obverse*:—Latin words with name of Hadrian, and his bust. *Reverse*:—Hadrian standing to the right before a female (Judea) who holds a box; between them a burning altar; on either side of the female a child holding a palm; behind the altar a bull.

and luxurious food. But, as Joshua knew would happen, the sea swept the whole banquet away, and it was only then that the Roman Emperor realised how foolish and impossible was his desire, for the sea was but one of God's servants who had been invited to the banquet, and a few waves of the mighty ocean had sufficed to destroy the luxurious feast.

Onkelos, or Aquila, the nephew of Hadrian, being anxious to become a Jew, and yet being afraid of his uncle, told Hadrian that he wished to embark on a certain enterprise. When Hadrian offered him some money, he refused to accept it, but said that he wanted instead his uncle's advice, as he was inexperienced in the ways of the world. "Purchase goods," replied Hadrian, "which do not at present command a high price, and are not favourites in the market, but for which there is reason

*A notable convert.*

to believe a demand at higher prices will eventually arise." Aquila betook himself to Palestine, and gave himself up to study. Rabbi Joshua helped him with his studies, and generally befriended him.

*A good  
bargain.*

On his return home, he again visited his uncle Hadrian. The Emperor, noticing that his nephew did not look as well as was his wont, inquired whether he had met with any losses in his new enterprise, or had been injured in any way. "I have met with no loss of money," said Aquila, "and, as your nephew, I am not likely to be hurt by any one." Being further pressed as to the reason for his poor looks, Aquila told his uncle they were due to his excessive studies. "And who told you to do such a thing?" asked Hadrian. "I acted on your advice," replied Aquila. "I have acquired a thing that stands at a low price just now, but will eventually rise in value. I found no nation in such low esteem, and so sure to rise in value, as Israel." Aquila will be remembered not only as one of the most notable converts to Judaism of whom we have record, but as the translator of the Bible into Greek. For this purpose he is said to have had assistance from Rabbi Joshua and other Rabbis.

*The  
Emperor's  
dream.*

One day the Emperor said to Rabbi Joshua: "You all boast you are very clever. See if you can tell me what I am going to dream about to-night." The Rabbi replied: "You will dream that the Parthians have conquered your country and taken you captive, and made you a driver of pigs with a golden staff." Hadrian, as it happened, was very much afraid of the Parthians, because they had raided the eastern borders of the Roman Empire and were the only people who had not been overcome by the Romans. What Rabbi Joshua had told him, therefore, weighed upon his mind, and he thought about the matter all day. People often dream at night about things they have been thinking about during the day, and the Emperor Hadrian thus dreamt about the Parthians when he fell asleep at night, just as Joshua had foretold.

*On the side of  
peace.*

When the people wished to rebuild the Temple, and desired again to resist the Romans, even by taking up arms once more against them, Rabbi Joshua ben Chananya threw in his lot on the side of peace, and pointed out how foolish it would be to try to oppose the Romans. It

was far better, he said, to be content with what they still possessed ; otherwise, they might lose that. To illustrate his views he told them the following fable :—

A lion, while devouring his prey, accidentally caught a bone in his throat. After many endeavours to remove it, he offered a great reward to any one of his numerous subjects who would relieve his mighty Majesty of his pain. Few animals ventured to undertake the operation. At last, however, the crane offered his services. They were joyfully accepted. The feathered physician put his long neck in the lion's throat, took hold of the bone with his long bill, extracted it, to the astonishment of all the bystanders, and then demanded the promised reward. "A reward, indeed!" said the lion contemptuously. "Is it not sufficient reward for thee to have permitted thy ugly neck to escape my mighty jaws, and askest thou now for a still further reward?" The crane thought this argument, if not convincing, very powerful, and went his way.

*The lion and the crane.*

"The moral of this fable," said Rabbi Joshua to the people, "is simple enough. Remember, dear brethren, you are under foreign rule. Recollect your past sufferings, and consider yourselves lucky that you enjoy the comparative ease and peace you have at present. At all events, do not provoke, by vain and useless resistance, the mighty power of the Emperor" (Hadrian, who, like the lion in the fable, had made promises which were not carried out).

*The moral of the fable.*

Rabbi Joshua was much praised after his death by his successors, and it was even said: "Since Rabbi Joshua died, good counsel has ceased in Israel." Other men have lived since his time who have given us "good counsel," but we can at all events remember the wit and practical advice which will serve for all time as a memorial of Rabbi Joshua ben Chananya.

*"Good counsel has ceased in Israel."*





## CHAPTER VII

53-135 C.E.

### IV. AKIBA. עקיבא

*The "second  
Ezra."*

RABBI AKIBA BEN JOSEPH was one of the pupils of Rabbi Joshua ben Chananya, and thus was the pupil of the pupil of Rabban Jochanan ben Zakkai. He was one of the greatest of all the Rabbis who lived about the time when Jerusalem was destroyed, and when the land of Judea was for ever taken away from the people of Israel. His personal character was noble, but he was clever as well. He was the chief of those who finally settled of what books the Bible should consist, and we owe to him a good deal of the system of laws and regulations which were built up on the "Law of Moses" and form the Mishna. Akiba was called "the second Ezra," and it was said of him that the Law of Moses was weak until he explained it. He certainly did much to put the Jewish Law into proper order. Another great man, Rabbi Judah the Prince, afterwards called Akiba "a sealed treasure," and compared him to a workman who goes into the street with his basket, and puts into it whatever he chances to find, but arranges everything in order when he returns home. Just as rings are attached to vessels in order that they may be easily handled, so, said Rabbi Judah, Rabbi Akiba had made rules for the Torah by which it might be easily understood.

*Akiba's marriage.*

Rabbi Akiba was so famous a man that all kinds of stories and legends have been associated with his life and teachings. In his boyhood days (he was born in the year 53) he was a shepherd, and whilst he was tending his master's flocks he had plenty of time to dream—and also to fall in love. For he became engaged (so the story runs) to a very rich merchant's daughter, whose name was



Rachel. The father, however, refused to consent to the marriage, and threatened Rachel that she would have none of his fortune if she persisted. But this did not prevent Akiba and his sweetheart from carrying out their wishes, and they became husband and wife. Akiba was probably glad that his wife had been disinherited, for he might have thought it dishonourable to marry a rich man's daughter against the father's will. But now, poor and friendless as they both were, he gladly took her, and she as gladly came.

Akiba's wife realised that they could not live on love alone, and so she made one condition to their marriage, and that was that Akiba should leave their home and study in the schools. He was thus, she said, to profit by God's good gifts, for young Akiba was a clever man. "Become a scholar," she said, "and then come back to me—you study and I will wait for your return." He is said to have been strengthened in his determination to try what he could do to adopt his wife's suggestion by one day accidentally noticing a stone, which, by the constant dropping of water, had been hollowed. "If," said Akiba, "this hard stone could thus be affected by the drops of water, why should not my heart be impressed, by constant study, by the influence of the Word of God?" *He becomes a student.*

They must have been very poor, for we are told that Rachel had to sell her hair in order to enable her husband to pursue his studies. But they were happy in spite of their poverty. Akiba comforted his wife on one occasion with the promise that when he became rich, as he hoped to be one day, he would buy for her what he called "a golden Jerusalem" (a diadem shaped like the "Holy City"). And poor as they were, they were not so poor that they forgot to be kind. Once, when a bundle of straw was the only bed they possessed, a poor man came to beg for some straw for a bed for his sick wife. Akiba at once divided with him his scanty possession, remarking to his wife: "Thou seest, my child, there are those poorer than we." Some of his neighbours objected to the smoke coming from the rushes which he burnt and used as a lamp, and told him that he ought to sell them and buy instead some oil with which to study. He did not, however, agree with *Rachel sells her hair.*

them, and said: "The straw serves three purposes for me—I study by it, I keep myself warm with it, and I sleep on it."

*At the college.*

At the college (for Akiba agreed to his wife's condition) the future great Rabbi soon made rapid progress in his studies, and later on was made Head of his college. We are told that soon after he began his studies he surprised his teachers by suggesting to them new points in the portions of the Law which he was learning. He was very persevering, and his teacher once illustrated this quality with the following parable: "A stone-cutter who was doing his work in the mountains was once seen standing upon a rocky height, knocking off small pieces of it. 'What art thou doing?' people asked him. His answer was: 'I am trying to uproot this mountain and throw it into the Jordan.' They laughed at him, but he continued his work; he knocked off piece after piece, and, when he had reduced the mountain to a big rock, he planted himself against it and pushed it, until he was able to throw it into the river Jordan." "In the same way," said his teachers, "has Akiba persevered, until he has even compelled us to improve our methods." We are not surprised, therefore, to find one of his colleagues saying to him: "To thee, Akiba, applies the following passage: 'He bindeth the floods from overflowing; and the thing that is hid bringeth he forth to light,' for things which were hidden from mankind thou hast brought to light." In later times he used to say, as he taught his disciples and was reminded of the way he spent his younger days: "I thank Thee, O Lord, my God, that Thou hast placed me among the studious, and not among the idlers in the markets."

*Akiba's return  
to his wife.*

After twelve years Akiba returned to his native village, and, entering the house where his wife lived, overheard an answer given by his wife to a neighbour, who was blaming him for his long absence. "If I had my wish," he heard Rachel say, "he should stay another twelve years at the academy." Taking Rachel at her word, and without crossing the threshold, Akiba turned back, and only returned after twelve years' study, during which he increased his reputation. This time the famous scholar came back escorted (so the story runs) by twenty-four thousand

disciples, who respectfully followed their beloved master. The visit of a great Rabbi to the little country place was looked upon as quite an event, and many hundreds of people came to welcome him. Among the crowd who came to meet the now distinguished Rabbi there was one shabby woman with her loveliness dimmed, but a world of longing in her sad eyes. When she, too, pressed forward, and even sought to embrace the great man, some of his pupils pushed her back, not being willing that such a poor woman should come near their master. But the years and the grief and the change had not dulled Akiba's sight, or lessened his love, though her beauty had waned and her poverty showed itself in her dress, all threadbare and worn. The husband knew his wife, and she knew him. Their affection for each other was above and beyond all accidents of time or station. Akiba caught Rachel in his arms and held her fast, never in this life to lose her again. And then, holding her to him, he turned to the astonished crowd and said: "My knowledge and your knowledge is all due to her. Let her alone. For what I am, and what we are, to this noble woman the thanks are due. For her love, and through her love, I have, by God's blessing, become what you see." And the crowd, touched and humbled, left them together.

Soon after Akiba's arrival, Rachel's father went to him (not knowing that he was his son-in-law). He was beginning to repent of his treatment of his daughter. "Master," said he, "may I break a vow? Long ago my only daughter married a stupid beggar, and I vowed never to forgive her, and never to look upon her face again. But I wish to be reconciled to her. Can it be?" Akiba smiled. "Was it," he said, "because the husband was stupid, or because he was a beggar that you made this vow? Would you have been as unforgiving to a distinguished scholar?" "Of course not," said the rich man, looking rather puzzled. "I would have welcomed such a man with open arms. I would even have been satisfied if he had been the least of your disciples." "Well then," said the tall, grave, imposing-looking Rabbi (tasting then, perhaps, the sweetest of all revenge—returning good for evil), "I know not if I be the distinguished scholar that men call me, but I certainly am the Akiba who married your daughter." *He meets his father-in-law.*



*How Akiba  
became a rich  
man.*

And so the two became friends, and Akiba, by inheriting his father-in-law's wealth, became a very rich man. He was now able to fulfil his promise to his wife, and he presented her with a magnificent robe, on which was embroidered in gold a picture of Jerusalem. When he was reproached for being so extravagant, he replied that his wife deserved whatever he did for her. His experience of the blessings of a good wife made him afterwards say: "He is rich who has a wife comely in all her ways." But other circumstances, besides his father-in-law's money, made the former shepherd lad a wealthy man. Akiba had been authorised by certain Rabbis to borrow a large sum of money from a prominent heathen woman. As bondsmen for the loan Akiba named God and the sea, on the shore of which the woman's house stood. The Rabbi fell ill, and could not return the money at the appointed time. But his bondsmen did not forsake him. A chest containing much valuable treasure was cast upon the shore, close to the house of Akiba's creditor, so that, when the woman went to the shore to demand of the sea the amount she had lent to Akiba, the ebbing tide left boundless riches at her feet. Later, when Akiba arrived to pay the debt, the woman not only refused to accept the money, but insisted upon his receiving a large share of what the sea had brought to her.

*Akiba and his  
lamp, cock, and  
ass.*

This was not the only occasion on which Akiba was made to feel the truth of his favourite maxim: "Whatever God doeth, He doeth for the best." He was once compelled, by the persecution of the Romans, to leave his native land. Akiba wandered over barren wastes and dreary deserts. His whole belongings consisted of a lamp, which he used to light at night in order that he might study the Law; a cock, which served him instead of a watch to announce the coming of the dawn; and an ass on which he rode. The sun was gradually sinking beneath the horizon, night was fast approaching, and the poor, tired wanderer knew not where to shelter and rest his weary limbs. Almost exhausted with fatigue and hunger, he came at last to a village. He was glad to find it inhabited; for he thought that where human beings dwell, there dwell also humanity and kindness. But he was mistaken. He asked for a night's lodging. It was, however, refused. Not one of the inhospitable inhabitants would give him shelter.



CARRYING THE SPOILS FROM JERUSALEM

(From a bas-relief on Titus's Arch in Rome)





Akiba was, therefore, obliged to seek rest in a neighbouring wood.

"It is hard, very hard," he said, "not to find a hospitable roof to protect me from the rough weather. But God is just. All that God doeth, He doeth for the best." The trustful Rabbi thereupon seated himself beneath a tree, lit his lamp, and began to read the Law. He had scarcely read a chapter, when a violent storm arose, and extinguished the light. "What!" he exclaimed, "must I not be permitted to pursue my study? But God is just. Whatever He doeth, He doeth for the best." Akiba then stretched himself on the bare earth, desiring, if possible, to have a few hours' rest. He had, however, scarcely closed his eyes, when a wild animal came and killed the cock. "What new misfortune is this?" said the astonished Rabbi. "My vigilant companion is gone. Who then will now awaken me to the study of the Law? But God is just. Whatever He doeth, He doeth for the best." The words had not been uttered a minute, when a lion came and carried off the ass. "What is to be done now?" exclaimed the lonely wanderer. "My poor ass, too, is gone—all is gone. But praised be the Lord! Whatever He doeth, He doeth for the best."

Akiba passed a sleepless night, and early the next morning he went to the village, to see whether he could procure another beast of burden to enable him to pursue his journey. His surprise was great when he found not a single individual alive. He learned that a band of robbers had entered the village during the night, and had killed the inhabitants and plundered their houses. As soon as Rabbi Akiba had sufficiently recovered from the amazement into which this wonderful occurrence had thrown him, he exclaimed: "Thou great God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! Now I know by experience that poor mortal men are shortsighted and blind, often considering as evils what is intended for their good. But Thou alone art just and kind and merciful. Had not the hard-hearted people driven me, by their lack of hospitality, from the village, I should assuredly have shared their fate. If my ass had brayed, if my cock had crowed, or if the robbers had seen the light of my lamp, I should surely have met my death." And so the faithful Rabbi said once more: "God is just; all that God doeth, He doeth for the best."

*"God doeth  
for the best."*

*How Akiba's  
life was saved.*

*A gardener's  
objection.*

Faith, said the Rabbis of old, is a very good thing, but no man has a right to neglect his duty, and cast himself on God, saying that he has trust in Him to do what he himself ought to do. People like Rabbi Akiba taught this practical lesson by their lives. One day the Rabbi was walking through the streets of Jerusalem with another wise man, when a sick man came up to them, complaining about his ailment, and asking their advice. When they told him of a remedy, another man came up to them and reproached them with not being religious. "If," argued the latter, "it is God's will that this sick man should have a certain disease, are you going to act against God's decision by removing the disease which has been decreed for him?" "What is your occupation?" demanded the Rabbis in reply. "I am a gardener, as you may see by the tools which I carry in my hands," answered the man. "But why do you interfere with the earth which God has created?" asked Rabbi Akiba. "If I were not to manure, prune, and water the trees," retorted the gardener, "how could I expect them to produce their fruits?" "Man is even like the tree of the field," returned the Rabbis. "He requires tender treatment and attention to his body to make it flourish and keep in good condition."



## CHAPTER VIII

### AKIBA (*continued*)

AKIBA'S imagination often led him to explain things in such beautiful language that his sayings may sometimes be called "pictures in words." He once wished to tell his pupils how short life really is, and that it is only given to us "on loan" to use to the best possible advantage. Thus he said: "Everything is given to man on pledge, and the net (of death) is cast over the living. The shop is opened. The dealer (the Lord of all the world) gives credit (for reward and punishment do not immediately follow our actions). Then the ledger is opened; the hand writes; and whosoever wishes to borrow comes and borrows. The bailiffs (the angels who allot reward and punishment—happiness and suffering) go round continually every day, and demand payment from every man, whether he be content or not. The judgment is a just judgment, and everything is prepared for the 'banquet' of Heaven" (for even the wicked have a share in the world to come). *On loan.*

Akiba gave the following advice to his son on one occasion: "Do not dwell in the high parts of the city, so that passers-by shall not disturb thee in thy studies. Do not dwell in a city whose leaders are scholars, because, not being practical men, they do not know how to look after its interests. Do not walk barefooted. Rise up early, and have an early breakfast in the summer on account of the heat, in the winter because of the cold. Turn thy Sabbath into a week-day rather than be dependent on thy neighbours. Do not enter thy own house suddenly unannounced; how much more so thy friend's house (in case thou shouldst see something of which they might be ashamed in thy presence—and why shouldst thou put them *Advice to his son.*

to shame?). Do not associate thyself with wicked people, lest thou do evil like them, for often one bad apple in a basket will spoil the rest. Associate with good people, in order that thou mayest copy their actions, and then thou wilt receive rewards like them."

*"New life."*

As an instance of Akiba's kindness and thought for other people, the following incident is told. One of his pupils became ill. Rabbi Akiba visited him. Not finding any attendant, he remained with the pupil, scrubbed the floor, and, in fact, did everything to make the sick man comfortable until he was better. The invalid said to his master: "Rabbi, you have given me new life!" Akiba afterwards publicly preached that "he who does not visit a sick person is as if he shortens his life."

*A good investment.*

In addition to trying to do good with the money that he possessed, Rabbi Akiba endeavoured to induce others to make good use of their belongings. His heart was, indeed, so full of kindness that it was compared to the door of a spacious palace—it was so wide and open. On one occasion Akiba said to Rabbi Tarphon, who was a very wealthy man, but was not charitable according to his means: "Shall I invest some money for thee in an estate in a manner which will be very profitable?" Rabbi Tarphon consented, and brought Akiba 4000 denars in gold. Akiba merely distributed the money among the poor. Some time afterwards, Tarphon met Akiba, and asked him where the estate was. Akiba led his friend to the college, and showed him a little boy, who recited the words of the Psalmist: "He hath dispersed, he hath given to the needy; his righteousness endureth for ever" (Psalm cxii. 9). "Listen!" said Akiba, "thy property is with David, the King of Israel, who said: 'He hath given to the needy.'" "And wherefore hast thou done this?" said Tarphon. "Could I not have distributed the money myself to the poor, without thy assistance?" "Nay," replied Akiba, "it is a greater virtue to cause another to give than to give thyself."

*A clever explanation.*

A man once said to Akiba: "I know, as well as thou knowest, that there is nothing real in an idol. But how is it that a cripple with broken limbs, whom I saw enter a heathen temple, came away healed and sound?" "I will explain this to thee by a parable," replied Rabbi Akiba.



"It is like a certain man, who was considered so trustworthy that his fellow-townsmen used to deposit their money with him without witnesses. One man, however, when he made a deposit, had witnesses present. Once he forgot himself and deposited his money without witnesses. The wife said to her husband: 'Come! Let us deny this deposit, and keep it for ourselves.' 'What!' said he, 'because this fool has acted imprudently, shall we forfeit our good name for honesty? No! this shall never be.' So," continued Rabbi Akiba, "it is with diseases. They leave people at certain times, and it may happen occasionally that this occurs when people visit a heathen temple. Should their cure be delayed, merely because certain fools have acted improperly by praying before images of wood and stone?"

In order to preserve health and to avoid catching disease, Akiba advised people to copy the rules of the Medes—*Good rules.* to carve meat only upon a table, to kiss only on the hands, and, when they had secrets to communicate, to do so in the open field; for "walls have ears."

Like so many of the other Rabbis, Akiba laid great *Study.* stress on study. Thus he said: "Study the Law in thy old age, even if thou hast studied it in thy youth. Do not say: 'I do not need to study when I am old;' but study it always, because thou knowest not which will succeed. If thou hast studied the Law in years of plenty, do not rely on that for the years of famine; as it is written: 'In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not which shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good' (Eccles. xi. 6)." "In the world to come," said the Rabbis in later years, "Rabbi Akiba will be a warning to the poor who have neglected study. When they are questioned why they have not studied the Law, and they answer because they were poor and had to work for a livelihood, then Rabbi Akiba will be held up to them as one who was also poor and wearied, and yet did study; and if they should say because of their little children, again Rabbi Akiba will be pointed to as a man who had many sons and daughters, and yet supported them and his wife Rachel."

## CHAPTER IX

### AKIBA (*continued*)

*Answering  
awkward  
questions.*

AKIBA was fond of meeting people who did not quite agree with his views, and answering any questions, however difficult, they might put to him. One day the Roman General, Turnus Rufus, inquired of Akiba: "If your God loves the poor, why does He not support them?" "God allows the poor to be with us for ever," replied the Rabbi, "in order that the opportunities for doing good may never fail." "But," said the General again, "how do you know that God approves of giving charity? If a master were to punish some of his slaves, keeping them without food, or drink, or clothes, would he be pleased if men were to come and feed and clothe them?" "Granted," answered the Rabbi; "but would a tender father, whose children had fallen into poverty and distress through their neglect, and who could no longer justly assist them—would he be displeased, do you think, if some kind person pitied and helped them? We are not slaves to a harsh master. God calls us His 'children,' and Himself our 'Father.'"

*Which is more  
beautiful?*

On another occasion Turnus Rufus asked: "Which is more beautiful, God's work or man's?" "Undoubtedly, man's work is the better," was Akiba's reply; "for whilst nature, at God's command, supplies us only with the raw material, human skill enables us to elaborate the same according to the requirements of art and good taste." Rufus had expected a different answer, and he tried to drive Akiba into a corner by another question: "Why has God not made man just as He wanted him to be? Why has He commanded you to go through the operation of circumcision, for instance?" "For the very reason," was the reply, "that the duty of man is to perfect himself."

Rufus also asked Akiba why one day (the Sabbath) was different from other days. Akiba replied by asking another question. "Why is one man," he said, "(that is to say, yourself, the governor) different from other men?" "Because of the will of my master, the Emperor," replied Rufus. Then Akiba said: "In the same way the Sabbath is different from other days on account of the will of its Master—God." "But why," continued Rufus, "does not God Himself rest, since He commands others to do so?" "A man may 'carry burdens,'" replied Akiba, "within the bounds of his house on the Sabbath. The whole world is God's house, and He can take things from one part of His house to another without labour."

*Answered in his own coin.*

"Why," asked Turnus Rufus of Rabbi Akiba on a subsequent occasion, "have we incurred the hatred of your God so that He says: 'I hate Esau'?" (the Romans were said to be the descendants of Esau). Akiba said he would reply to the question on the following day. On his making his appearance next morning, Rufus, thinking that Rabbi Akiba had postponed the answer the day before in order meanwhile to invent some lame explanation, said to him: "Well, Akiba, what have you dreamt during the night?" Rabbi Akiba, taking the very question as the text for his reply, said: "I dreamt I possessed two dogs which I named Rufus and Rufina" (the General and his wife). Rufus, in a great fury, asked Rabbi Akiba how he dared offer him and his wife so great an insult as to call his dogs by their names. "Don't be so angry," returned Akiba calmly. "You and yours are God's creatures. So are dogs God's creatures. You eat and drink, have children, live, decay, and die. All this is also the case with dogs. Yet how angry you get because they bear the same name as you! Consider, then, that God stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth. He is the Creator, Ruler of all things, whether they be living, or without life. Yet you make an idol of wood and stone, worship it, and call it by the name of 'God.' Should you not then incur His hatred?"

*Akiba's distinguished dogs.*

Rabbi Akiba had a daughter, and the astrologers told him that, on her wedding-day, she would be bitten by a serpent, and would die. The Rabbi was naturally very distressed about this prophecy, but neither he nor his

*Akiba's daughter.*

daughter thought any more about the matter after a little time. On her wedding-day a poor man came to the door, begging for a morsel of bread. As every one in the house seemed to be too much engaged in preparations for the wedding to pay any attention to the poor man, the bride took part of her own meal, and gave it to the beggar. In the evening, before she went to bed, she took a wreath from her head, and fastened it with a nail on a wall in the pavilion erected for the bridal couple. The nail entered the eye of a serpent which was concealed there, and killed it. On the following morning, when she took down the wreath, the serpent fell to the floor. She told her father of the incident, who at once asked her what good act she had performed. When she told him that she had given some of her own food to a beggar on the previous day, he remarked that the good deed she had done had delivered her from death, and he quoted the saying: "But charity delivereth from death" (Prov. x. 2); and the verse: "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days" (Eccles. xi. 1).

*Proof positive.*

A man once asked Rabbi Akiba: "Who created this world?" "The Holy One; blessed be He," was the reply. "Give me positive proof of this," demanded the Rabbi's questioner. "What are you dressed in?" asked Akiba. "In a garment, of course," was the reply. "Who made it?" then asked the Rabbi. "A weaver," said the man. "I do not believe you," said Akiba; "give me positive proof of this." "I do not need to prove this," answered the man; "it stands to reason that a weaver made it." "Even so," replied Rabbi Akiba, "you must know that God created the world." When the man had departed, Akiba's pupils asked him what "proof positive" meant. He replied: "My children, in the same way as a house implies a builder, and a garment a weaver, and a door a carpenter, so likewise the existence of the world implies that it came into being by the hand of God."

*The meaning of a smile.*

On one occasion, when Rabbi Akiba and three other Rabbis were in Rome, they heard the hum of the great city, showing its prosperity. Akiba smiled, and the others wept. His companions said to Akiba: "Why do you smile?" He asked them in turn why they cried. They



replied: "When we see these idolaters sitting at rest in peace in their houses, whilst our Sanctuary is burned down, shall we not weep?" Akiba said to them, however: "That is just why I am smiling. If this is the reward of those who are wicked for any little good they may do, how much more reward shall those who worship God obtain?"

Another similar incident occurred when Akiba was walking with some companions near the site of the burnt Temple. They saw a fox stealing out of the ruins. Rabbi Akiba laughed. "Why do you laugh?" they asked. "And why do you lament?" he asked them in reply, for they had burst into tears. "How can we do anything but be sad," they cried, "when we see the Temple destroyed, and its ruins become dens of wild beasts?" "It is just on that account that I rejoice," said the hopeful Rabbi. "If the disasters threatened by the prophets have come upon us ('For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim. Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, foxes roam about'—Lam. v. 17-18), surely the salvation promised us by them will also be given to us in God's good time. For hath not the prophet said (Jer. xxx. 18-19): 'Behold, I will bring again the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have mercy on his dwelling-places; and the city shall be builded upon her own heap, and the palace shall remain after the manner thereof. And out of them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of them that make merry: and I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small'?" Then his colleagues said: "Thou hast comforted us, O Akiba, thou hast comforted us."

*The fox in the ruins.*

With all his scholarship and knowledge, Akiba practised and preached modesty. "He who esteems himself highly on account of his knowledge," he would say, "is like a carcass lying on the wayside; the traveller turns his head away in disgust, and walks quickly by." To his pupils he said: "Take thy place a few seats below thy rank, until thou art bidden to take a higher place. For it is better that they should say to thee, 'Come up higher,' than they should bid thee 'go down lower'" (Prov. xxv. 7). "If thou hast acquired knowledge," he said, "do not at the

*Akiba's modesty.*



same time acquire a haughty spirit on account of thy knowledge; and if thou intendest to expound God's word, recite to thyself twice or thrice what thou intendest saying." On one occasion, acting on this maxim, Rabbi Akiba declined to read the Law, when he was called upon to do so, on the ground that he never did so unless he had rehearsed the portion twice or thrice to himself previously.

*His son's  
funeral.*

Akiba's modesty is also shown by his address on the occasion of the funeral of his son Simon, which took place in a city in the province of Galilee, in the north of Palestine. To the large assembly of men, women, and children gathered on the occasion from every quarter he said: "Brethren of the house of Israel, listen to me. Not because I am a scholar have ye appeared here so numerously; for there are those more learned than I. Nor because I am a wealthy man have ye come; for there are many more wealthy than I. The people of the south know Akiba; but whence should the people of Galilee know him? The men are acquainted with him; but how shall the women and children I see here be said to be acquainted with him? Still I know that your reward shall be great, for ye have given yourselves the trouble of coming simply in order to do honour to the Torah and to fulfil a religious duty."

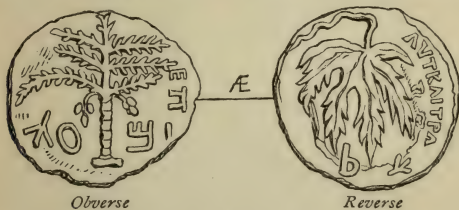
*Akiba and  
Bar Cochba.*

The part that Akiba played in the rebellion against the Romans which was led by Bar Cochba ("the son of a star") illustrates his love for his country. The times were very troublous indeed. The tyrannous yoke of Rome lay so heavily upon Israel that Akiba believed that things could not be worse; he thought, therefore, that a crisis was at hand, and that a Messiah would come and deliver the people from oppression and tyranny. When Bar Cochba came forward, he looked upon him as the promised Messiah, quoting the Bible verse: "There shall come a star out of Jacob" (Num. xxiv. 17). His efforts were, however, all in vain. Over half a million Jews were put to death by the Romans. Many were taken captive to Rome, and the most learned and pious men of the country suffered the death of martyrs. Among those who were arrested was Akiba himself. Akiba believed very much in Bar Cochba, and became his most strenuous supporter in spite of the warning of his colleague, Rabban Gamliel: "Grass will grow from thy jaws ere the Messiah arrives." He had

an intense and even narrow patriotism. For him God was the "God of Israel," who would free His people from Roman oppression. Any one who would assist in bringing this about was to him some one sent by God. This explains his keenness in supporting Bar Cochba's claim to be the Messiah. The revolt failed; but, till it was crushed, Akiba believed in its leader, and went about the country encouraging people to rally to Bar Cochba's standard.

Rabbi Akiba's death was as eloquent as his life. The Romans had made a decree that any one who taught the Jewish Law should be put to death. Akiba had disregarded this decree, and this, added to his share in Bar Cochba's revolt, no doubt made the Romans eager to

*The fox and  
the fishes.*



COIN ISSUED DURING BAR COCHBA'S REVOLT

*Obverse:*—Hebrew word "Simon" (Bar Cochba's name) and a palm-tree. *Reverse:*—Hebrew words "The deliverance of Jerusalem," and a vine leaf.

kill him. One day a man named Pappus ben Judah (who advised the Jews to submit to the Romans at all costs) said to Akiba: "Dost thou not fear the fate which is before thee? Would it not be better to give up teaching the Law and thus save thy life?" "I will tell thee a fable," replied the Rabbi. "A fox was once walking on the banks of a stream, and saw a number of fishes gathered together in great fear at the bottom of the water. 'Why are you so frightened?' said the fox. 'Men,' replied the fishes, 'are spreading their nets in the stream to catch us, and we are trying to escape.' 'I'll tell you what to do,' observed Reynard. 'Go yonder upon the rocks, where the men cannot catch you, and let us all dwell together as one people, as my father dwelt with your fathers.' 'Are you indeed the fox,' exclaimed the fishes, 'who is esteemed the most clever of all animals? You must certainly be

the most stupid, if you give us such advice. The water is our native element, and, if we are in danger here, how much greater will be our risk if we leave it?"

*The moral.*

"Pappus," said Rabbi Akiba, "the moral of the fable is simple. Religion is the source of all good. For that alone we exist. If men pursue us, we should not basely flee from danger by taking refuge in death. We are told of the Lord that 'He is thy life, and the length of thy days' (Deut. xxx. 20). That is when things are peaceful with us. How much greater is our need of Him, then, in times like these?" Soon after, when Bar Cochba's revolt had failed, Akiba was arrested, and so also was Pappus. They met in prison, and Pappus said to the Rabbi: "Happy is Akiba, who hath been imprisoned on account of his devotion to the Law. Woe is Pappus, who hath been imprisoned for trivial matters."

*Cleanliness in prison.*

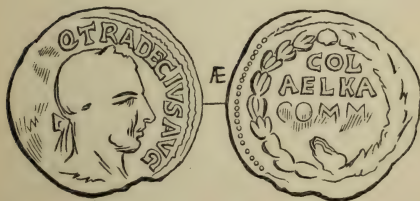
Akiba, like all the Rabbis, followed Jewish custom in attaching great importance to the religious duty of washing the hands before meals. One day, during his imprisonment, the gaoler said to Akiba's servant, as he was about to enter his cell: "What a lot of water thou hast brought to-day. Dost thou need it to sap the walls of the prison?" So saying, he seized the vessel, and poured out half of the water. When the servant brought in to Akiba what was left of the water, the Rabbi, who was weary of waiting (for he was faint and thirsty), reproachfully said to him: "Dost thou forget that I am old, and my very life depends upon thee?" The servant told Akiba what had happened, and the Rabbi asked for the water to wash his hands. "Why! master," said the servant, "there is not enough for thee to drink, much less to cleanse thy hands." Akiba replied: "They who neglect to wash their hands are judged worthy of death. It is better that I should die by my own act from thirst than act against the Law."

*Rabbi Akiba's heroic death.*

Akiba was condemned to death by the Romans. When the Rabbi was led forth to the place of execution, it was just the time for the morning service. He therefore recited the *Shema*. "Hear, O Israel! the Lord is our God, the Lord is One," he exclaimed calmly, and in a loud, firm voice, although he was suffering agonies from the torture, for his skin had been torn off with irons. When the Roman Governor, Turnus Rufus, asked him whether

he was a sorcerer, since apparently he felt no pain, Akiba replied : "I am no sorcerer ; but I rejoice at the opportunity now given me to love my God with all my soul, seeing that hitherto I have been able to love Him only with all my heart and with all my might. I know now what it is to 'love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.'" And, so saying, he died.

Akiba was one of the greatest of the Jewish Rabbis. *Practising as well as preaching.* He indeed practised what he preached. The one thing was for him bound up in the other. Thus, some of the Rabbis were once discussing which was greater, the study of the Law, or the practice of it. One said : "Practice is the greater." "No," said Rabbi Akiba, "study is the greater, because study brings about practice." His teachings and his life will, indeed, serve for all time as patterns for those who follow him. The pretty love story of the days of his youth, and the brave conduct which accompanied his heroic death, are incidents which should live in the memories and the hearts of all those, whether they be young or old, who admire the brave and the gentle, the good and the true.





## CHAPTER X

90-160 C.E.

### V. MEIR. מַאִיר

*His early days.* RABBI MEIR lived in the second century, being the pupil of Rabbi Akiba. He was born in Asia Minor, and earned his living by copying scrolls of the Law. Except that when quite young Rabbi Meir entered the school of Rabbi Akiba, little is known of his early days. Finding the teaching given in Akiba's school too difficult for him, he went to another House of Learning, returning to Akiba when he had made sufficient progress in his studies. Rabbi Akiba soon found how clever his pupil was, and made him Rabbi over the heads of his other pupils.

*A legend of Nero.*

A legend says that Rabbi Meir was descended from the Roman Emperor, Nero, who escaped when he was removed from his position as Emperor, and subsequently became converted to Judaism. The legend narrates that a rumour reached Rome in the time of the Emperor Nero that the Israelites proposed to rebel. A large army was collected to suppress the revolt. The Emperor, desiring to have a good omen for the expedition, shot an arrow into the air, and carefully watched the direction in which it descended. The arrow fell in the direction of Jerusalem. Nero then went to the opposite side of the path, and, shooting another arrow into the air, observed that this, too, came down pointing towards the Holy City. He did the same from many other positions: every time the arrow fell in the same way. The Emperor thereupon took this as an omen supporting the venture.

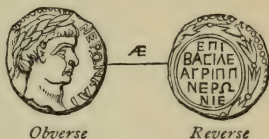
*The instrument of God's anger.*

One day, on the way to Jerusalem, he met a Jewish boy, and said to him: "Recite to me the first passage of your Law which you learnt to-day." The boy quoted the

passage from the prophet Ezekiel, which foretells that God would destroy Jerusalem and raze the Temple to the ground, but would also cause to perish the nations that rose up against the Jews. The Emperor was surprised at this, and thought to himself: "Apparently I am to be the instrument of God's anger, and then the turn of the instrument (myself) will come." He took this very much to heart, immediately gave up the siege, disappeared from public life, and became a Jew.

Rabbi Meir received a notable example of courage and strength of character from one of his old teachers, Rabbi Judah ben Baba. During the troublous times in Jerusalem the old man fled to the mountains, and there gathered round him a band of disciples for the purpose of ordination as Rabbis, which had been made a capital offence by the Romans. One of these was Rabbi Meir. Their presence in the hills became known to the Roman spies, who came to their hiding-place. As soon as Rabbi Judah saw that they had been discovered, he said to his pupils: "Run away, my children."

*In the mountains.*



A JEWISH COIN OF THE TIME OF NERO

*Obverse*:—Greek words meaning "Nero Emperor," with the head of Nero laureated. *Reverse*:—Abbreviated Greek words meaning King Agrippa at the time of Nero.

"And what will become of you?" they answered. "I shall throw myself before my enemies," said the old man, "like a stone that nobody looks at or takes care of." Then the Roman troops came upon them. They killed the brave old man, throwing three hundred iron spears at him. Rabbi Meir and his fellow-students were, however, able to escape, and fled in various directions.

When the Emperor Hadrian was dead, and Antoninus Pius succeeded to the Roman throne, things took a turn for the better. The Emperor permitted the Rabbis (amongst whom was Rabbi Meir) to found a school in the city of Usha. Meir must have been very active in this academy, for it was here that he was given his name "Meir" (which means "One who sheds light"), his real name having been Mayasha. In later years Meir was a colleague on the Beth Din of Rabbi Simon ben Gamliel,

*Shedding light.*

the father of Rabbi Judah the Prince. Rabbi Simon was Head of the Court, and had very great regard for the dignity of his position. He passed a rule that when Rabbi Meir entered the Court only one row of those present need rise, whereas when he himself entered everybody had to stand up. Meir did not like this rule, and he made up his mind to retaliate on Rabbi Simon by asking him a question which he would not be able to answer. Simon, however, learned what was proposed, and was able to prepare himself. On other days Meir, however, contented himself by asking Simon other very difficult questions of which he had not had warning. Simon was naturally annoyed, and forbade Meir to sit on the Beth Din. Meir, though he was a young man, did not approve of following the teachings of even the most distinguished men without individual study. He retorted, therefore, to Simon, who had not paid him the respect which was due to his learning: "Look not to the vessel, but to its contents. Many a new vessel contains old wine, and there are old vessels which do not contain even new wine." With this final thrust at his enemy, Rabbi Meir left Usha and settled in Asia Minor.

*An embassy to Rome.*

One day a message came from the Roman Emperor to the wise men of Palestine: "Send us one of your great lamps." At first the Rabbis did not understand the message. But at length they realised that the Romans wanted them to send one of their greatest scholars to the Senate to discuss certain questions affecting the Jews and their religion. They sent Rabbi Meir, because he was the man who shed light on the Torah, and therefore was a "great lamp." They were not disappointed in their hopes, because Rabbi Meir answered all the questions put to him in a satisfactory manner, his knowledge of the Greek language assisting him in this.

*Rabbi Meir's powers of argument.*

Rabbi Meir put new life into the development of the *Halacha*, or practical side of the *Law* (as opposed to the *Agada*, containing theoretical discussions, moral lessons, and stories), and continued the labours of Rabbi Akiba in putting this rich material into proper order. His powers of argument and discussion were so great that his hearers followed him with much difficulty. It was said that he was able to give one hundred reasons to prove that an article

of food was *kosher* (i.e. permitted to be eaten by Law), and an equal number of reasons to prove that it was *trifa* (not allowed to be eaten). The arguments on either side were so nearly equal that it was sometimes difficult to find out the Rabbi's real opinion, and many of his decisions were not, therefore, respected as much as if he had given more decided answers.

Rabbi Meir must have had a wonderful memory, as the following incident proves. On one of his travels, during the feast of Purim, he found himself in a small village where no copy of the Book of Esther could be found. His work as a copyist had enabled him to learn many of the sacred books by heart. He was able, therefore, to write out the whole book from memory without a single mistake! In the same place Rabbi Meir found a family nearly all of whose members had died at an early age in life. The survivors asked him to pray for them; but he advised them instead to be of a charitable disposition, for they would by that means prolong life.

*A feat of memory.*

The Rabbi was much attached to his family, and his wife Beruriah was as good and pious as her husband. There dwelt in the neighbourhood of Rabbi Meir's house some Jews who were followers of Greek customs. This annoyed the Rabbi very much. In his vexation he would have prayed to God asking that they should be destroyed. But his wife said: "Be mindful of the teachings of thy faith. Pray not that sinners may perish, but that the *sins* may disappear, and no opportunity for their practice remain, not as the Psalmist says: 'Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more' (Psalm civ. 35)."

*Rabbi Meir and his wife.*

The confidence in God cherished by Rabbi Meir and his wife was beautifully shown in the sad death of their two sons. This occurred suddenly, one Sabbath, whilst the Rabbi was away from home at his school. His tender-hearted wife did not at first tell him what had happened, in order that he might not be grieved by the sad tidings on the sacred day. When the Sabbath was over, however, she said to him: "My husband, some time ago two precious jewels were placed with me for safe keeping. He who left them with me called for them to-day, and I delivered them into his hands." "That

*Death of his two sons.*



is right," said the Rabbi approvingly; "we must always return cheerfully and faithfully all that is placed in our care."

*The return of  
the jewels.*

Shortly afterwards the Rabbi asked for his two sons, and the mother, taking him by the hand, led him gently into the chamber of death. The Rabbi, realising the truth, wept bitterly. But his wife consoled him with what he had just said to her. "Weep not, beloved husband," said the Rabbi's noble wife; "didst thou not say to me that we must return cheerfully, when called for, all that has been placed in our care? God gave us these 'jewels.' He left them with us for a time, and we gloried in their possession. But, now that He calls for His own, we should not be too much grieved, but even thankful that they have been preserved to us so long." "True!" replied Rabbi Meir; "'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord' (Job i. 21)." And, addressing his wife, he continued: "Blessed be His name for the gift of thee also. For a virtuous woman has greater treasure than costly pearls" (her sons). "'She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue'" (Prov. xxxi. 26).

*As peace-  
maker.*

Rabbi Meir was, like so many of the Rabbis, active in making peace between people who quarrelled. On one occasion he heard of two men who lived with each other but were seldom good friends. Throughout the week, whilst they were at work, and had their time occupied, they were at peace with each other. As soon, however, as the Sabbath arrived, they commenced to offend each other and quarrel. Meir secured an invitation to spend three weeks with them. By his pleasant, amiable words he calmed them, and taught them the value of peace. "These people," he said, "have lived for three weeks without quarrelling. They are now used to living peacefully together. They only quarrelled because they had nothing else to do, and from sheer habit." What Rabbi Meir did was to go to one of them and say: "Look here, my friend, just see what your companion is doing. He is sitting there very sad, saying, 'I am ashamed of myself—how can I look at my friend's face?'" Then he went to the other, and told him: "I have just come from your friend. He doesn't know what to do to appease you." When, therefore, they

met, they fell on each other's neck, and became friends again.

It was, however, Rabbi Meir's stories, fables, and maxims that secured him the greatest popularity. He was well versed in Greek and Latin, and was thus able to draw upon the literatures of Greece and Rome for the stories with which he charmed his hearers. He is said to have composed no fewer than three hundred fables dealing with foxes. Of these the following is an example :—

A fox said to a bear : "Come, let us go into this kitchen. They are making preparations for the Sabbath, and we shall be able to find food." The bear followed the fox. But, being a big animal, he was captured and punished (for his father had already been troublesome in the house). Angry at this, he wanted to tear the fox to pieces. "You knave," exclaimed the bear, "why did you deceive me?" "I am not at fault," replied the fox; "you have probably been punished on account of your father's sins."

"Nay," said the fox (continues the fable), "come with me, my good friend; let us not quarrel. I will lead you to another place, where we shall surely find food." The fox then led the bear to a well, where two buckets were fastened together by a rope, balanced like a pair of scales. It was night, and the fox pointed to the moon reflected in the water, saying : "Here is a fine cheese. Let us descend, and partake of it." The fox entered his pail first. But, being too light to balance the weight of the bear, he took a heavy stone with him. As soon, however, as the bear had got into the other pail, the fox threw the stone away. Consequently, he rose, whilst the bear descended to the bottom. "How shall I get out?" asked the bear. "It is written in Scripture," said the sly fox, "'The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead' (Prov. xi. 8)."

From this part of the fable Rabbi Meir draws the moral that each man must suffer for his own sins. "He who follows the 'luminary of the night' (greediness)," he said, "must perish, whilst the righteous one, though carrying a stone (sin), will be delivered from death, if he throws it away in time."

Another of Rabbi Meir's fables was as follows : A fox one day seeing some delicious fruit hanging from some

*Rabbi Meir's fables.*

*The fox and the bear.*

*A fine cheese.*

*The moral of the fable.*

*The fox and the garden.*

trees in a garden, had a strong desire to eat some of it. He ran round the garden wall, which was too high for him to climb over, in the hope of finding an open gate. But the only entrance was a narrow opening, and Reynard found that he was too fat to creep through. He therefore fasted three days, until he had become thin enough, and then crawled through into the garden. After having spent a long time among the fruit-trees, and eaten more than satisfied his appetite, the fox tried to get away. But he found that, as before, he was too fat. He therefore had to fast another three days. When he crawled through the entrance the second time, he was just as thin as before. "Garden! garden!" he exclaimed, when he was outside again, "thou art indeed charming and delightful. Thy fruits are delicious and exquisite. But of what benefit art thou to me? What have I now for all my labour and cunning? Am I not as lean as I was before?" "Even so," said the Rabbi, "is it with man. Naked he comes into the world's garden. Naked he must go out of it. And, of all his toils and labour and worldly goods, he can carry nothing with him."



## CHAPTER XI

### MEIR (*continued*)

MEIR'S wit often saved him from misfortune. Once he made a long journey, and put up for the night at an inn. The innkeeper was a dishonest man. He would arouse his guests during the night, and tell them that they must proceed on their journey. Then, offering his services, he would accompany the guests a short distance, and, when they reached the woods, his practice was to kill and rob them. Rabbi Meir became suspicious of the innkeeper before he had been long in the house. He was aroused at midnight in the usual way, but said to the innkeeper: "I have a companion in the city, and I cannot leave without him." Mine host rejoiced that he would have two victims instead of one, and asked Rabbi Meir what his companion's name was, and where he was stopping. "My companion's name is *Kitob*, and he is sleeping at the *Beth Hamedrash* (House of Learning)," replied Meir. The host hurried to the Beth Hamedrash, and called out in loud tones: "Kitob! Kitob! Your companion wants you. He cannot proceed on his journey without you." But there was no response. In the meantime day dawned, and Rabbi Meir prepared for his journey. As he was about to mount his ass, the innkeeper said to him: "Why did you deceive me? You have no companion." "I did not deceive you," replied Rabbi Meir. "Cannot you see my companion with your eyes? Is it not written in the Bible, 'And God saw the light, that it was good' (Gen. i. 4)? The two Hebrew words, *כִּי טוֹב* (*Kitob*), mean 'that it was good.' My companion is the daylight. If, therefore, you see the light, you see my companion!"

"Show thyself humble to every man" was one of Rabbi Meir's favourite sayings, and he acted up to his motto in his own life. The Rabbi used to give addresses on Friday

*Meir's companion.*

*Rabbi Meir's Friday evening addresses.*



evenings after the Sabbath meal. They were very well attended, since they contained a word in season for all classes of the community. The rich were to be charitable and the poor hopeful; employers were told to be kind to their workpeople, and the latter were advised to be faithful to their masters. Parents carried away advice as to the training of children. Teachers were impressed with the necessity of patience, and pupils were told to be obedient and diligent. Wives—for whose benefit especially the addresses were given—were taught the duties which are necessary to make husbands and homes happy.

*A jealous husband.*

Among the women in the audience was one who had the misfortune to have a jealous husband. As soon as the sermon was over, she hastened home, only to find the house in darkness, and her husband very angry. "Where have you been?" he inquired. "As you are aware, my dear husband," the wife replied, "I, like others, appreciate so much the sermons and teaching of the good and wise Rabbi, that, when I am able to do so, I like to hear him, and always feel that I carry away some useful lesson." This little speech only made the foolish husband still more angry. "You shall not step over the threshold of my house," he cried, "without going to your beloved Rabbi, and spitting in his face." The poor woman at first looked upon this ridiculous order as a foolish whim, which would soon pass.

*The Rabbi's sore eyes.*

Unfortunately, the fool persisted in his folly. The affair became known in the town, and finally Rabbi Meir heard of it. The neighbours persuaded the woman to comply with her husband's wish. When, however, she appeared before the Rabbi, her courage failed her. The kind Rabbi, who was only anxious that peace should be restored between the woman and her husband, regardless of his own dignity, pretended to have sore eyes. He ordered her to spit into them seven times as a remedy. The woman stated that once would suffice. "Never mind," said the peace-loving Rabbi, "go home and tell your husband that you wished to spit only once in my eyes, but that you did so as many as seven times. This will please your husband." She did as Rabbi Meir told her, and peace was thus made between the woman and her husband. To his pupils, to whom his conduct seemed strange, Rabbi

Meir explained that the good end of making peace between man and wife had justified this harmless pretence, as otherwise there would have been no happiness for the poor woman. Incidents like this fully justify the description afterwards given of Meir that he was "a great man and a saint, and humble withal."

Rabbi Meir must have been very fond of addressing children. We can almost imagine him now, in one of the Synagogues or Houses of Study, with a group of boys and girls round him listening to one of his delightful fox stories. One day he wanted to explain to them that in their hands rested the future of the community, and that they must, therefore, prepare themselves for the great responsibility which would afterwards be theirs. He told them the legend that when the Law was about to be given on Mount Sinai, God said to the Israelites: "Bring me 'sureties' that you will keep the Law, and I will then give it to you." The children of Israel then said: "Our ancestors will be our sureties." But God replied: "I cannot accept them, for they have passed away. Bring me better ones." And then they said: "Our prophets will be our sureties." "They are not sufficient," was the reply, "for they, too, are no more." The Israelites then offered the sun and the moon and the hills. But these, too, were rejected, for they were not lasting. At last the Israelites said: "Our children will be our sureties." And God said: "These will I accept." Rabbi Meir told his young audience that they were thus the guarantees for the Law. On them, therefore, rested the duty of learning and observing as much of it as they could, in order that they might be able to be true to the confidence placed in them as "sureties" for the Law. The future of Judaism was indeed in the hands of the young, for they would afterwards become the men and women whose duty it would be to preserve and practise their faith in the days to come.

Rabbi Meir hated ignorance, and one of his sayings was: "He that gives his daughter to an *עַם הָאָרֶץ* (*Am-Ha-Arets*, "a man of the earth"—a Hebrew expression used to denote an ignorant man) "is as though he bound her, and laid her before a lion."

"Love the friend who blames thee, and hate the one who flatters thee; for the former leads to life and the future

*"Our children will be our sureties."*

*Some of Meir's sayings.*

world, whilst the latter puts thee out of the world," was another wise saying.

The following are some further maxims :—

"When thou art in Rome, do as the Romans do."

"Travellers should go in threes ; for a single traveller is likely to be murdered, two are likely to quarrel, but three will always make their way in peace."

"He who does not work on week-days will end by being compelled to work even on Sabbaths. For idleness leads to misery, and misery to crime ; and, once a prisoner, the idler will be forced to labour, even on the Sabbath."

"Have less worldly occupation so as to spare more time for the study of the Torah."

"Learn the ways of the Law with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul."

"Better few prayers with devotion than many without it."

*Two experiments.*

On one occasion a man, who wished to scoff at religion, asked Rabbi Meir how it was possible for God to have divided the upper waters from the lower waters, according to the account of the beginnings of the world given in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. Meir answered the question by making an experiment with two tumblers of water. He placed one above the other, with the first tumbler top downwards, without spilling the water. "If man can do this, shall not it be possible for God?" said Rabbi Meir. The scoffer then asked how it was that God was confined in a small space when He spoke to Moses. Meir asked the man to look into the concave and convex sides of a curved mirror. "If you," the Rabbi said to him, "can show yourself in whatever form you wish, shall not He, at whose word the world came into existence, *appear* in a very great or very small space as He wishes?"

*A "stiff-necked" race.*

"Why was the Law given to Israel?" he asked himself once. "Because they are an obstinate people," he replied. "If any other people had gone through what Israel has suffered, they would have given up the Law. The Jewish people may have been 'stiff-necked' in the course of their history in the sense of being obstinate in clinging to idolatry. But they have been stiff-necked in their optimism as well. This has enabled them to preserve their identity in spite of all the persecution which they have had to endure."

Rabbi Meir's generosity and confidence in God may be illustrated by the fact that, of the three shekels he earned each week, two he spent on his household expenses, and the third he gave to poor fellow-students. When he was asked why he did not save something for his children, Meir replied: "If my children are good, the Lord will provide for them. If my children are not good, they deserve nothing."

*The Rabbi's generosity.*

With all his piety, Meir showed a spirit of great tolerance, and he declared that a heathen who studied the Torah was more worthy than a High Priest who did not do so. His tolerance is best shown by his friendship to Elisha ben Abuyah, who had formerly been his teacher, but afterwards forsook Judaism. In the hope of reclaiming him, he would often associate himself with Elisha. When blamed for learning from Elisha, Rabbi Meir exclaimed: "When I see a juicy pomegranate, I enjoy its contents, and throw away the skin." Elisha (he meant) may not have been an observant Jew; but he had a wide knowledge of the Law, and that Meir could draw upon whilst rejecting his false views. In the course of teaching his pupils, Rabbi Meir was asked by some of them: "If you were to pray for the salvation of any one, for whom would you pray first?" The Rabbi answered: "For my teacher Elisha ben Abuyah first, and then for my father." The pupils expressed surprise at this, and said: "But will you have power to redeem such a Rabbi?" Rabbi Meir answered that, in the event of danger to the Torah, the scroll of the Law was to be rescued, together with the Ark in which it was placed, even on the Sabbath. In the same way he was sure that Elisha, who was learned in the Law, would be saved for the sake of the Torah that was in him.

*Elisha Ben Abuyah.*

Elisha was also known by the name of "Acher" (another), "Acher." because he had turned his back on the past and become quite another kind of man. When he left the Jewish religion, Elisha went round to the various schools and endeavoured to persuade the pupils to give up study. "What benefit is it for you," he would say, "to waste your time on such nonsense? Become builders, and carpenters, and tailors." Rabbi Meir never despaired, however, of trying to bring his teacher back to Judaism. He saw Elisha once on the



Sabbath riding on horseback past the Beth Hamedrash, where the Rabbi was explaining the Law. Meir came out to greet his old teacher, and walked beside him.

*An interesting argument.*

Elisha was the first to speak, and asked Rabbi Meir: "What was the subject of your discourse to-day?" Meir replied: "I have just been reading the words of Job (xlii. 12): 'So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning,' which meant that his possessions became doubled." Elisha replied: "Rabbi Akiba explained the verse thus: 'God blessed Job at the end because of the good actions of his early days, which still remained with him.'" Then Elisha asked the Rabbi in what the second portion of his discourse consisted, and Meir answered: "'Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof' (Eccles. vii. 8). When a man loses children in the early days of his marriage, but has others remaining with him to bless his old age, then the end of that man's life is surely better than the beginning." Elisha replied: "Your teacher Akiba explained the verse in this way: 'If a man has learned the Law in his youth, forgets it, learns it again in his old age, and then keeps it, his end is better than his beginning.'" Then Meir said that in the same way as gold and glass vessels might be put together again, when broken, by being melted, so people who were once learned, but had lost their knowledge, might retrace their steps and regain what they had lost.

*Stealing a bird's nest.*

Elisha replied by telling Meir how he had ceased to believe in Judaism. "I once saw," he said, "a man climb a tree and take the mother bird and its young from a nest in disobedience of the Law: 'If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in the way in any tree, or on the ground, . . . thou shalt not take the dam with the young . . . that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days' (Deut. xxii. 6). The man came down quite safely. Then I saw another man climb the tree and take the young from another nest, letting the mother bird go free, as the Law commanded. He, however, fell and died. Did not the Law say, 'That thou mayest prolong thy days'? Where is the happiness and length of days of the man who died? It seems to me that there is no just God." Meir, who was always ready with an appropriate explanation of passages in the Bible, said that the words, "That it may be

well with thee," referred to this world, whilst the words, "And that thou mayest prolong thy days," applied to the world to come. There was thus no inconsistency in the incident to which Elisha had alluded. "The ways of Providence," said Rabbi Meir, "are mysterious, and we must not cease to trust in God because of a small incident, which we do not understand."

Elisha then suddenly stopped, and said to Meir: "I *Too late!* have had enough. You must turn back, for I have counted by the steps of my horse that we have reached the limit of a Sabbath day's journey" (2000 cubits). "You turn also," said Meir, wishing Elisha to obey the Sabbath rule as well. But he replied: "No, it is too late—I cannot return to the fold." Rabbi Meir told his pupils that he was still hopeful about his teacher, for Elisha had not forgotten the Law, and the conversation had done him good. One saying of Elisha ben Abuyah is worthy of mention: "What a man learns when a child is like ink written on clean paper. What he learns in his old age is like ink written on paper that has already been used."

Like Rabbi Akiba, Meir would often give his pupils *Honesty between neighbours.* lessons in courtesy and consideration for others. Thus he said: "You should not press a neighbour to join you at a meal, if you know that he will not accept the invitation. You should not heap presents on a man when you know for certain that he will not accept them. Do not invite a person to anoint himself with oil when you know the jar is empty. Do not open a cask of wine, and pretend to a guest that it has been specially opened for him, when you have really already opened it to sell from it to a wine-dealer. Do not try to aggravate your friend when he is in a temper. Do not come into his house at the moment of his downfall. And do not try to intrude on his sorrow when he is in trouble."

On one occasion Rabbi Meir was reproving some *Birth and death: a pretty custom.* wealthy men for their neglect of duty, and he pointed out to them that they would leave the world no richer than when they entered it. "When a man comes into the world," he said, "his hands are bent inwardly, as if to say: 'The whole world is mine and I will inherit it.' But, when a man departs this world, his hands are opened out, as if to say: 'I have taken away nothing with me.'"

Part of the service at the conclusion of the Sabbath (*Habdalah*) consists in blessing God for the use of fire. The youngest child of the family holds a lighted taper, and the person who says the blessing holds his hands over the flame, at first with his fingers clenched, and then with them open. At first the clenched hands catch the shadow, and then the open hands receive the light of the flame, thus showing the difference between the possession of light and fire and the want of it. But this pretty ceremony may also be taught to mean that people should not hoard their money with tight fists and give none away to other people. For later on, when they die, their hands will be open and empty, and they will then take away nothing from this world, as Rabbi Meir taught.

*"A great man  
and a saint."*

Rabbi Meir died in Asia Minor, where he had gone after his quarrel with Simon ben Gamliel. His last year had been saddened by the death of his two sons. Just before he died, he said to his pupils: "Bury me by the shore, so that the sea, which washes the land of my fathers, may touch my bones also." Though, during his life, he had very many enemies, after his death every one praised his virtue and greatness. "He opened the eyes of the wise in the Law" was one remark made about him. And in the funeral sermon recited over his grave it was said of him that "he was a great man and a saint, and was humble withal."

*Rabbi Meir's  
money-box.*

In the houses of many pious Jews to this day a money-box is hung up on the wall, bearing Rabbi Meir's name, in which a collection is made for the poor of Palestine. The box has the inscription: "Charity of Rabbi Meir *Baal Nes*." *בַּעַל נֶסֶם*. "Baal Nes" means "master of miracles"; this name was given to Meir on account of the wonderful things he was said to have done. In many places amongst Jews, if any one is married or engaged; loses a relative; is about to start on a journey or has returned from one; does a good stroke of business, or loses money; is about to light the Sabbath lamps; becomes Barmitzvah—in fact on all kinds of occasions—it is the custom to give something to charity. If the charitable gift takes the form of some coins in Rabbi Meir's money-box, the donor says: "Behold I give this free gift as a charity for the poor of the land of Israel," and the following

is recited : "O God of Meir, answer me! May it please Thee, O Lord, our God, and the God of our fathers, as Thou didst hear the prayer of Thy servant Meir, of blessed memory, and wast good to him, so likewise do for me, and for all Thy people Israel. Amen!"

We may perhaps remember this grand old Rabbi in other ways as well—by endeavouring to follow some of his fine teaching, and storing up in our "memory-box" a little of the wisdom and the wit, the tolerance and the kindness, with which the "shedder of light" illumined his own good life, and made brighter and better the lives of his people.

*How to re-  
member Rabbi  
Meir.*





## CHAPTER XII

90-160 C.E.

### VI. SIMEON BEN YOCHAI. שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחַי

*A visit to  
Akiba  
in prison.*

RABBI SIMEON BEN YOCHAI belonged to the same generation as Rabbi Meir, and was born in Galilee in the second century. He was a pupil of Rabbi Akiba for thirteen years, and was naturally a warm admirer of his great teacher. When Akiba was thrown into prison by the Roman Emperor Hadrian, Simeon, through the influence of his father, who was in favour at the Court at Rome, found his way into the prison, and insisted on Akiba continuing to teach him. When the latter refused, Simeon laughingly threatened to tell his father, who would cause Akiba to be punished more severely.

*Simeon ar-  
rested.*

Early in his career Rabbi Simeon was arrested by the Romans, and sentenced to death. He had been engaged in conversation with two other Rabbis about the Romans. One of them had said: "How useful this nation has been everywhere! It has erected towns with market-places. It has put bridges over rivers, and built bath-houses for preserving health." Simeon replied to this by saying: "What the Romans do, they only do for the sake of selfishness and gain. Their houses are used for bad purposes. They misuse the bathing-places, and levy toll at the bridges." A Roman soldier heard this, and arrested Simeon. He managed to escape, however, and took refuge in a cave with his son Eleazar. There they lived, the story goes, for thirteen years on dates and beans and water.

*Escape from  
the cave.*

One day, seeing that a bird had repeatedly escaped the net set for it by a hunter, Rabbi Simeon and his son were encouraged by the example thus set them to leave the cavern. On leaving the cave, the Rabbi bathed in the

warm springs of the city of Tiberias, and cured himself of a disease which he had contracted in the cave in consequence of not having been able to bathe for so many years. Out of gratitude for this, Simeon changed Tiberias from an "unclean" city to a clean one, by removing the tombs which existed there.

On their way to Tiberias, Rabbi Simeon and his son met an old man hurrying along with two bunches of myrtle in his hand. "What doest thou with these?" they asked him. "To smell in honour of the Sabbath," was the reply. "Would not one bunch have been quite enough for that purpose?" they then asked. "Nay," said the old man, "one is in honour of זְכוֹר—'Remember' the Sabbath, which is the word used in one part of the Bible (Exod. xx. 8), and the other is in honour of שְׁמֹר—'Keep' the Sabbath, which is the phrase mentioned in another part of the Bible (Deut. v. 12)." Thereupon Rabbi Simeon turned to his son, and said: "Behold how the commandments are regarded by Israel!"

*Two bunches  
of myrtle.*

Rabbi Simeon's son, Eleazar, afterwards became the pupil of Rabbi Judah the Prince. His early years in the cave with his father had not left the same feeling of hatred towards the Romans which Rabbi Simeon naturally possessed. Eleazar, in fact, became quite friendly with them, and afterwards acted as their agent in arresting robbers. His appointment to this post came about in the following way. A discussion once arose among the Rabbis as to the best method of catching robbers. Eleazar gave the following as his plan of discovering them: "I get up," he said, "at four o'clock in the morning, and go to the tavern. If I see there a man holding a cup of wine in his hand, half asleep, I inquire how he comes to be there so early in the morning. He may be a scholar, who has been studying all night, and is dozing off. Or, perhaps, he is a working man, who has to be at his work very early. On the other hand, he may be a craftsman, who is engaged in making needles, or some other occupation performed at night time, and has just finished his work. But, if he is neither a scholar nor a workman, I know he must be a robber." The Roman governor heard of Eleazar's plan, and sent the following message to him: "The writer of a letter should carry out the advice which it contains," mean-

*How to catch  
robbers.*

ing that, if he knew how to catch robbers so well, he ought to become a thief-hunter.

*"You vinegar,  
son of wine!"*

Eleazar accordingly accepted the position, but this action of his, in arresting robbers on behalf of the Romans, aroused the anger of some of the Rabbis, for the Romans used to hang them. "You vinegar, son of wine!" one of them said to him (meaning, "You bad son of a good father"), "why should you hand over the people of God to these soldiers?" "I am only weeding out the thorns from the vineyard of Israel," replied Eleazar. "Why should you interfere?" said the Rabbi indignantly. "Let the Owner of the Vineyard come and clear His own thorns. Why should you presume to act as the Judge in place of God?"

*A deserved  
rebuke.*

When Eleazar had completed his studies, he became somewhat proud. One day, whilst he was travelling homewards, he overtook a man bound in the same direction. The man greeted him, but Eleazar did not return the salute. The man was ugly, and Eleazar asked jestingly: "Are all the people in your town as ugly as you?" The man quietly answered: "Go to the Master who made me, and reproach *Him* for making such an ugly person as I am." Eleazar at once saw that he was at fault. Descending from his ass, he asked the man to pardon him. But the stranger replied again that he should go to the Master who made him. Eleazar then humbly followed the man on foot all the way praying to be forgiven. When they reached the city, the citizens came out and greeted Eleazar, saying: "Welcome, our Rabbi and Teacher!" The strange man called out to them, however: "Do you call that man 'Rabbi'? May there be very few like him among us." He then told them of Eleazar's treatment of him. The citizens begged him to pardon Eleazar, because of his great knowledge and wisdom, and this he then did.

*Some of Rabbi  
Simeon's  
sayings.*

"There are three crowns," said Rabbi Simeon. "The first is that of scholarship, the second that of the priesthood, the third that of royalty; but the crown of a good name mounts above them all." Simeon once declared that, if he had been on Mount Sinai when the Law was given to Israel, he would have asked for two mouths for man, one to be used exclusively as a means for repeating,

and thus learning the Torah. "But then," he added, "how great also would be the evil done by bad people with two mouths!"

"One should throw oneself into a burning furnace rather than shame a neighbour in public," was another of his sayings, as were also the following:

"If people sit down to a meal without uttering a few words of the Law, and thus providing food for the mind and soul, as well as for the body, it is as if they had eaten of the sacrifices of the dead. If they *do* repeat some words of the Law, it is as if they had eaten at the table of the Lord."

"So great is the power of repentance that, however wicked a man has been during his lifetime, if he but repent towards the end, he is considered a perfectly righteous man."

"Two ships," said Rabbi Simeon, "were once bound together with strong chains and metal plates, and a palace was built on top of them. So long as the ships kept together, the palace held fast. Once they separated, the palace fell to pieces. In the same way the palace of Heaven rests on the unity of Israel. Its faith can only rest on a solid and united foundation."

Rabbi Simeon was once asked why the manna was given to the children of Israel in the wilderness every day, and why it could not have been given to them all at once for a whole year. The Rabbi replied: "There was once a king who had a son, to whom he made an allowance once a year sufficient to last for the whole year. The result was that the son only came to see him once a year, when he received his money. The king, therefore, gave him a daily allowance instead, so that the son should come to see him every day. In the same way manna was given by God every day to the children of Israel, in order to make them turn their hearts to Him every day."

On another occasion Rabbi Simeon said to his pupils that the whole of the community was to blame if any single member committed a sin. "Why is this?" they asked. "I will tell you a story," replied the Rabbi. "There was once a boat full of people. A man suddenly took a piercer, and began to bore a hole through the

*Two ships.*

*The king and his son.*

*The story of the hole in the boat.*



bottom of the boat. The frightened passengers cried to him: 'What are you doing?' 'Be quiet,' replied he. 'I am only digging a hole underneath my own seat. *You* are not affected.' 'Stop,' they replied, 'for the water will come in, and drown us as well as you. We are, indeed, very much affected by your reckless action.' So it is with one man's bad conduct. It affects others as well. This, therefore, should make us careful when we propose taking a wrong step in life, or commit a bad deed."

*A "star" of  
the Talmud.*

With this excellent advice we must take leave of Rabbi Simeon. Some people think that he was the same man as Bar Cochba, the leader of the revolt against the Romans in the time of Rabbi Akiba, and that he had to dwell in the cave to escape his enemies. He is also thought to be the author of part of the *Zohar*, the curious book of the "Cabbalists." But, whether Rabbi Simeon was or was not the "son of a star," we can certainly include him among the "stars" of the Talmud firmament. For, even if he had only left behind him his saying about "the crown of a good name," and his story of the hole in the boat, we should still wish to preserve his memory and his teaching among these "Stories of the Rabbis."



## CHAPTER XIII

135-220 C.E.

### VII. JUDAH THE PRINCE. יהודה הנשיא

ON the day that Rabbi Akiba met his martyr's death at the stake, with the *Shema* on his lips, there was born the last of the *Tannaim*, or "Reciters" of the Mishna—Rabbi Judah, who was destined to complete the work of those who had lived before him. "Before one sun set," as the Rabbis put it, "another arose." He was afterwards called (like Hillel and his descendants, who were Heads of the Sanhedrin before Judah) *Ha-Nasi* ("the Prince"), both because he was a descendant of King David on his mother's side (on his father's side he belonged to the tribe of Benjamin), and also because he was recognised by the Romans as the chief of the Jews in Palestine. He became so famous, and his decisions were received with so much respect, that, in addition to being called "the Prince," he was called simply "Rabbi." He was also called "the Holy," on account of the simplicity and holiness of his life. It was said of him, too, that "Judah's cattle-stalls are worth more than the treasure chambers of the King of Persia," and "If the Messiah were upon earth, he would be like Judah; and if the latter might be compared with the departed saints, he would be like Daniel the Beloved." He spent his early days in the city of Usha, where Rabbi Meir had taught. In his house the purest Hebrew was spoken, and the choice speech of the "maids of the House of Rabbi" became quite famous.

The infant Judah was circumcised, according to Jewish law, when he was eight days old, in spite of the Roman law forbidding the ceremony. The fact that this had been done reached the ears of the Roman Emperor, and he

*An exchange of babies.*

summoned the parents to appear before him, and bring with them the infant. Upon their arrival in Rome, the distressed mother at once called upon the Empress, who was her friend, and asked her to help them to escape the peril which awaited them. The Empress was moved with compassion and tender sympathy for her friend. With true motherly wit she hit upon a plan, which answered well. Her Majesty, having also an infant son named Antoninus,<sup>1</sup> who was about the same age as young Judah, proposed to the agonised mother to exchange children for the time being. The plan succeeded, and the Emperor thought that his decree had been obeyed. Antoninus and Judah, who thus came in contact when they were but babies, afterwards became friends for the remainder of their lives, and many interesting stories are told of their friendship.

*Rabbi's love  
affair.*

We have already read, in the course of these "Stories of the Rabbis," of one love-story, in which Rabbi Akiba was concerned. Rabbi Judah the Prince was one of the parties in another "love affair." This did not occur in his youth, like that of Akiba, but when he was getting on in years, and after his first wife had died. The lady of his second choice was also not young. She was the widow of Rabbi Eleazar, the son of Rabbi Simeon ben Yochai. We learn that she was of respectable family, and that her father was a wealthy man. She was a model wife to Rabbi Eleazar, and we are told that she was an excellent cook and a good nurse. Her husband was ill for a long time before his death, and his wife spent all her dowry on making him comfortable. Her resources and ingenuity in the kitchen must have been very great, for she cooked for him daily a number of different kinds of tempting dainties.

*A Jewish  
heroine.*

"A Jew without a wife is no man," said the Rabbis. Old and young were alike to marry. Rabbi Judah, therefore, old as he was, was bound to marry. But why did he court the old widow rather than an old maid or young girl? As marriage was considered a duty, there would be very

<sup>1</sup> This "Antoninus" is thought by some modern scholars to be the famous Marcus Aurelius; by others to be Antoninus Pius; and by others again to be Septimus Severus, Caracalla, Lucius Verus, &c. His exact identity still remains uncertain.

few of either of these two classes unmarried. Rabbi Eleazar's widow was probably considered a desirable "match" on account of her knowledge. Riches Judah did not want, and "if a person has knowledge, he has everything; if he has no knowledge, he has nothing." "He alone is poor who is not possessed of knowledge," said the Rabbis. "As a rule," says the Talmud, "a woman is more desirous of being married than a man." Rabbi Judah's love-affair provides an exception to this rule. In her lonely widowhood and poverty the greatest man of his day offered the widow of Rabbi Eleazar his hand and his heart, with all the comforts of a palace. But such was her unfading love for the memory of her dead husband that she persistently rejected the princely suitor, with all his tempting inducements, and is thus entitled to a place in the ranks of Jewish heroines. She remained sacred to the last to the memory of her first love, Rabbi Eleazar ben Simeon, for he excelled, as she said, in "good works."

But Rabbi was not yet to be turned away from his desire, and he pleaded: "Granted that thy husband excelled me in knowledge of the Law, yet, in good works, who is greater than I?" Her reply to this was: "Whether he excelled thee in knowledge, I know not, but I know that he surpassed thee in good works, for he suffered much in his body, in order that he might be of use to the poor." The parties in Rabbi Judah's little love-affair did not, like Akiba and Rachel, live "happily ever afterwards." For his suit was rejected, and the poor widow preferred to live alone, with the memory of her husband, than become the wife of him of whom it was said: "From the days of Moses unto Rabbi, we find not learning and riches combined in one person."

Rabbi seems to have won the favour of the Roman rulers, and he was enabled to make good use of the wealth which he was fortunate enough to possess. His clothes were made of such beautiful, fine cotton that, it was said, if they were rolled together, they would occupy the size of only a nut and a half. His scents were costly, and his servants as numerous as those used in the royal palaces. He himself, however, lived quite simply at the city of Sepphoris. With the generosity which is one of the privileges of princes, he gathered round him a number

*Judah's suit  
rejected.*

*Princely  
generosity.*



of pupils, whom he supported entirely at his own cost. At a time of famine this Jewish Prince and Rabbi threw open his storehouses, and distributed corn to the needy, as did Joseph in the days of old in Egypt.

*Kindness to animals.*

Rabbi had a warm corner in his heart for animals, and he would often be moved to tears at their suffering. On one occasion a calf, which was being led to the slaughtering-block, ran to him as if seeking protection. "Go," said Rabbi, "for thou hast been created for this purpose." Afterwards, accusing himself of want of mercy for the suffering animal, he attributed to this his years of illness, which he bore with great resignation. Once, when his daughter was about to kill a small animal which was in her way, he said: "Let it live, child, for it is written (in Psalm cxlv. 9), 'The Lord is good to all: and His tender mercies are over *all* His works.'" Rabbi's gratitude to God for his own life appears in the blessing which he said, when eating meat or eggs: "Blessed be the Lord who has created many things, in order to support by them every living being."

*Rabbi's meekness.*

Rabbi Judah was a very meek and humble man, to whom "conceit" and "boastfulness" were strange qualities. He always tried to put the virtues of others above his own. He used to say: "I am prepared to do anything reasonable that any man may ask me to do." Though he was the chief of all the Rabbis of his time, he would rise when he saw a Rabbi named Huna, who was much inferior to him in position. Rabbi explained that Huna was a member of the tribe of Judah, whereas he himself, on his father's side, only belonged to that of Benjamin. He thought it, therefore, his duty to pay respect to a man whose descent gave him a higher claim for the position of leader in Israel.

*A present of great value.*

On one occasion Rabbi received, as a present from a non-Jew, a pearl of great value. He sent in return a *Mezuzah* (the little parchment scroll affixed to the doors of houses inhabited by Jews and containing verses from the Bible). His friend thought that this was an unworthy gift, as his own present was of such priceless value. Rabbi Judah replied that not only was his present precious above all the possessions of them both, but it had a great advantage over the valuable pearl. The pearl had to be guarded, whereas *his* present would guard its possessor.

"Which road should a man choose?" asked Rabbi Judah. "One which is creditable to the traveller and honourable in the eyes of mankind," he replied. "Be as exact," he continued, "in thine observance of the minor precepts as of the most important, for thou knowest not what reward is attached to each command. Balance the loss which thou mightest sustain in consequence of the performance of a duty with the reward in a higher sense, which thou wilt receive in doing good and being strictly just and honourable. Bear always three things in mind, so that thou commit no offence: There is an Eye that sees all, an Ear that hears all, and a Hand that inscribes all thy deeds in a book!"

Rabbi privately recited every day a prayer, which is now included in the Jewish daily prayer-book. *A prayer.* "May it be Thy Will, my God and the God of my fathers, to protect me against impudent men and against being impudent in manner or word, from bad men and bad companions, from evil inclinations, from a difficult trial and a hard opponent, whether he be a son of the Covenant or not" —Jew or Gentile. Although he was protected by the Emperor's grace, he still prayed to be protected by God rather than by man.

Rabbi Judah was a great lover of peace; and he used often to explain to his pupils what an important matter it was to live at peace and in a friendly way with their companions. One day he made a feast for them, and ordered, as one of the courses, tongues of different kinds. There were soft tongues and hard tongues. The pupils commenced to pick out the soft ones, and left alone those which were hard. "What you are doing now," then said the Rabbi to the pupils, "I trust that you will do always. In the same way as you select the soft tongues and leave the hard ones, even so should you always use a gentle tongue and spurn hard speech when you speak to your friends."



## CHAPTER XIV

### JUDAH THE PRINCE (*continued*)

*The  
Emperor's  
underground  
passage.*

THE Emperor Antoninus, with whom, it will be remembered, Judah came in contact when they were both babies, afterwards became a very close friend of Rabbi, and their names have been associated in many a story and anecdote. Antoninus, it is said, afterwards became a Jew as a result of his intercourse with his friend, and even lived



*Obverse*

*Reverse*

COIN OF ANTONINUS PIUS

*Obverse* :—Latin words with name of Antoninus Pius, and his bust. *Reverse* :—Latin words for Ælia Capitolina (Jerusalem). Bacchus, standing, holding bunch of grapes and spear; at his feet a panther.

with him for some time. The Emperor, in order to be able secretly to communicate with Rabbi, had built an underground passage, leading from his palace to Rabbi's house. Antoninus used to send, day by day, through this tunnel, a leather bag full of gold, on the top of which he placed

sheaves of wheat, saying to his slave: "Carry this bag of wheat to the house of Rabbi." The latter one day said to the Emperor: "Why dost thou send me gold? I am rich enough, and need it not." Antoninus replied: "Bequeath it to thy descendants, who, in order to avoid persecution, will have to pay dearly to my successors."

The Emperor used to meet the Rabbi in the passage, and, in order that no one might know of the meetings, he adopted the cruel practice of killing one of the two slaves who accompanied him when he arrived, and the other

*Hidden  
treasure and  
wisdom.*

when he returned. Evidently his companionship with the Jewish sage had not succeeded in converting him from the barbarous notions of his age, when among the Romans human life was held cheaply indeed. What untold treasure might not this underground passage unfold to us, if we but knew its position! And what riches in wit and wisdom, in repartee and the teaching of Judaism, might it not reveal to us, if its walls could have preserved those secret conversations between the Roman Emperor and his Rabbi friend!

Rabbi invited Antoninus to dine with him one Sabbath, when all the dishes were cold. After some time, Rabbi again had the Emperor as his guest at dinner. This time he came on a week day, when warm food was served. Antoninus, however, expressed his preference for the food he had enjoyed at Rabbi's table on the Sabbath, although it was cold. "Ah!" said the Rabbi, "there is something missing to-day, which we cannot procure. The necessary spices are wanting to make the dishes enjoyable." "But," replied Antoninus, "surely my wealth can procure anything. I have spices enough in my stores." "No," answered Rabbi, "the Sabbath is the spice which made my cold dishes so enjoyable, and that your means cannot procure."

*Something missing.*

Antoninus frequently put questions in which he tried to belittle Judaism, and catch Rabbi tripping. For instance, he one day said: "Should not a man pray every hour?" Rabbi replied that this was not at all necessary. Antoninus pretended, however, to disagree. After a while Rabbi called on Antoninus, and was careful, as always, to address him with great politeness. After about an hour, he called once more, and addressed the Emperor again carefully, with all the titles he was accustomed to use. Rabbi Judah repeated his visits at intervals of about an hour every day. At last Antoninus told him that he did not feel at all honoured by his frequent visits, which, in fact, became quite a burden. "Therein," said the wise Rabbi, "lies my reason for telling you that man should not address the Throne of Mercy every hour, as such frequency savours of contempt."

*Why not pray every hour?*

Rabbi was once asked by the Emperor whether, in the future world, it was not possible for the wicked to plead that their sins were committed by their bodies, and that,

*The story of the blind and lame men.*



since they were now souls without bodies, they should no longer be held to be guilty. Rabbi replied by telling the Emperor a story. "A king once possessed a garden, which contained all kinds of choice fruit-trees. He set as watchers over the garden a blind and a lame man. The latter wished to taste the tempting fruit, but, owing to his deformity, he was unable to climb the tree to satisfy his appetite. The blind man also could not gratify his desire, as, although he could smell the delicious fruit, he could not see the tree which contained it. They conferred together. Finally, the blind man suggested that his friend should stand on his shoulders, and thus reach the fruit on the tree. They did this, and their united efforts proved successful."

*Punished as  
one man.*

Some days afterwards the King came to the garden. Missing his finest fruits, he asked the watchers where they had gone. The lame man said: "I could not get at them, for I cannot walk." And the blind man replied: "I cannot even see them, so that I could not possibly have taken any." But the King saw what had happened, and, placing the lame man on the shoulders of his blind colleague, he punished them as one man. "So it is with man's body and his soul," continued Rabbi, "you cannot separate the one from the other. On the day of judgment the soul and body will be punished together."

*Bar Kappara's  
riddle.*

One of Rabbi Judah's pupils was named Bar Kappara. He was somewhat of a wit, and, like some schoolboys of to-day of whom we have heard, he was fond occasionally of having a joke at the expense of his master. Bar Kappara had been well taught by Rabbi Judah; he was a learned man, and possessed a large store of parables. In contrast to him was a son-in-law of Rabbi Judah, who was very rich indeed, but at the same time an ignorant man. He used to parade his wealth before the pupils of Rabbi Judah. This they naturally resented. Bar Kappara especially disliked him, and seized every opportunity of playing a trick upon him. On one occasion he said: "Why do you sit in the company of these scholars, like a dumb animal, whilst all the others are asking questions, and discussing matters with Rabbi? Let me give you a riddle, which no wise man will ever disclose." The foolish son-in-law

allowed himself to be persuaded, and learnt the following riddle:—

“High from heaven her eye looks down.  
Constant strife excites her frown.  
Wingèd beings shun her sight.  
Youth she puts to instant flight.  
The aged, too, her aspect scout.  
‘Oh, oh!’ the fugitive cries out.  
And by her snares whoe’er is lured  
Shall never more from sin be cured.”

The son-in-law did not understand the riddle. But he nevertheless asked the scholars the meaning of it before his father-in-law. Of course Rabbi Judah followed it, and saw the satire in it. The “eye,” looking down from heaven, was Rabbi’s haughty son-in-law, whose “frown” excited “constant strife.” The “winged beings,” or learned men, shunned his sight, because he was so proud of his riches. “Youth” was afraid of him, because he was Rabb’is son-in-law. And “the aged,” too, feared him for the same reason. The other learned men smiled whilst the riddle was being put. Rabbi Judah, however, was very angry that his son-in-law was put to shame in the presence of such a large company. *The meaning of the riddle.*

Soon afterwards Rabbi gave a large banquet. In order to punish his pupil for what he considered an insult, he invited all the wise men with the exception of Bar Kappara. The latter was naturally upset at this slight. He went to the banqueting-hall, and wrote on the gate: “240,000,000 shekels have been spent on these festivities, but they have not invited Bar Kappara. If such be done to those who act contrary to God’s will, what will be done to those who follow His bidding?” Rabbi acknowledged his mistake after the banquet, and gave orders for a splendid repast to be prepared in honour of Bar Kappara. The pupil could not, however, resist having another hit at his master. This time he wrote on the gate: “If those who do God’s will are so treated in this world, how much greater will be their lot in the world to come?” Still, he was not quite reconciled. At the feast he commenced to tell the invited guests a host of stories and fables. The result was that, instead of partaking of the good things laid before them, *A feast of stories.*

they were so interested in Bar Kappara's funny tales that all the food was left—much to the annoyance of Rabbi Judah.

*"Cast thy bread upon the waters."*

As Bar Kappara was once strolling along the sea-beach, near the city of Cæsarea, he saw a man, almost naked, who had just saved himself from a shipwreck. Bar Kappara approached him, took him home, fed and clothed him, gave him a few pieces of silver for travelling expenses, and accompanied him part of the way. Some time afterwards a neighbouring nation attacked some of the cities of Palestine, and seized many Jews for the purpose of selling



COIN ISSUED UNDER THE ROMAN EMPEROR DOMITIAN

*Obverse*:—Greek words with name of Domitian, and his head.

*Reverse*:—Greek words with name of Agrippa. Turreted female standing on the prow of a vessel, holding in right hand ears of corn, and in left a cornucopiae.

them as slaves. Bar Kappara was selected as ambassador to go to the King and ask for the release of the captives, for which purpose he was given 500 silver pieces as ransom. When Bar Kappara came to the King, he was amazed to find that the man whom he had helped after the shipwreck was vizier to the King. The vizier at once recognised him, and asked what his business was with the King. Bar Kappara told him the object of his visit, and, through the intervention of the vizier, the Jews were released, and the 500 pieces of silver were presented to Bar Kappara. Thereupon Bar Kappara quoted the words of the Bible: "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days" (Eccles. xi. 1).

On the whole, Rabbi liked his pupil, by whom he was entertained, although he did not always approve of his

*A prophecy fulfilled.*

fun. But Bar Kappara's jokes still continued. On the occasion of the wedding of a daughter of Rabbi, Bar Kappara wagered the foolish son-in-law (of riddle fame) that he would drink a cup of wine which should be filled by his mother-in-law (Rabbi's wife), and that Rabbi himself should dance in his presence whilst he did so. In the course of the festivities Bar Kappara asked Rabbi the meaning of a certain word in the Law. Rabbi explained it in various ways, but Bar Kappara disregarded all his explanations. Rabbi thereupon said to him: "Now *you* tell me what it is." The jester said: "Very well. Let your wife fill me a cup of wine. You have a dance in honour of your son-in-law, and I will meanwhile think over this verse." Rabbi, not knowing of the wager, did as was suggested. Thus the wager was won, and the foolish son-in-law was so angry that he went away from the banquet.

Bar Kappara was not the only man who tried to get the better of Rabbi Judah. A Persian once called on him, and asked him to instruct him in the Jewish faith. Rabbi naturally commenced by showing him the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The Persian wanted to argue with him, and asked: "How do you know that this letter is called *Aleph*?" The Rabbi pinched his ear by way of a reply, and the Persian cried, "Oh, my ear!" "How do you know," asked the Rabbi, "that this is an ear?" The Persian was thus paid back in his own coin. He was pleased by this witty retort to his own doubting, and commenced to acquire a knowledge of the Jewish Law.

Rabbi's death caused much grief all over the country. *Rabbi's death.* It is said that on his deathbed he held up his ten fingers, saying: "I have not enjoyed more of the luxuries of this world than these ten fingers could have brought me by daily labour with them." On the day of his burial there were funeral orations throughout the Jewish communities in all countries.

Rabbi Judah the Prince will always be remembered as the man who, about the year 220 C.E., completed the Mishna—that wonderful collection of Jewish traditional laws, of which we have already spoken. He thus finished the work which Hillel had commenced and Akiba had continued. "Open thy mouth and read," he said to one *The editor of the Mishna.*

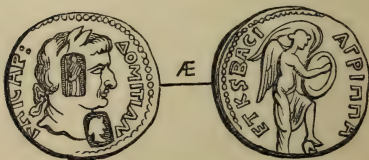


of his pupils, "open thy mouth and study; for only by living speech is study advanced." Rabbi Judah put into order the decisions and writings of the Rabbis who had gone before him, and thus prepared the way for the completion, three centuries later, of the Talmud, of which the Mishna forms a part. His "road," at all events, was "creditable to the traveller, and honourable in the eyes of mankind." Rabbi Judah fully deserved all the titles which were given him. He was, in truth, a "Prince"—in kindness and generosity to his fellow-men and to dumb animals. He was *the* "Rabbi" of his time in his great scholarship, which enabled him to be the compiler of the Mishna. His gentleness and meekness, modesty, simplicity, and trust in God merited the title "Holy." The proverb "Put not your trust in Princes" was certainly not meant to apply to people like Judah *Ha-Nasi*.

"We can make  
our lives sub-  
lime."

The foregoing have comprised an account of the lives and work and teachings of some of the most important of the Rabbis of the Talmud. We have met with pretty love-stories and the heroic deaths of martyrs; with the widest generosity and tolerance, and the highest degree of unselfishness; with the best type of modest, gentle lives; and with a wit and wisdom seldom equalled. They have provided the Jewish people—and indeed all peoples—throughout the ages with patterns of noble, unselfish, scholarly lives. And of them we can say with all truth and sincerity—

"Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime,  
And, departing, leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time."



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THE END





